

Man-of-war stings send two to hospital

By **KAREN JEFFREY**
STAFF WRITER

FALMOUTH - West- and south-facing beaches in Falmouth were temporarily closed yesterday as a small fleet of Portuguese man-of-wars washed ashore.



■ West and south-facing beaches in Falmouth were temporarily closed yesterday as a small fleet of Portuguese man-of-wars washed ashore.

(Photo by Associated Press)

Two people were taken to the hospital for treatment of wounds caused by the tentacles, but their injuries were not considered life-threatening, according to a fire department spokesman.

Town employees waved visitors out of the water and off the beaches long enough to remove the dead sea creatures from the beaches.

Throughout the afternoon at least eight people sought assistance from the Falmouth Fire and Rescue Department after being stung while in the water, according to fire Lt. Bruce Girouard.

"The problem is the tentacles can be 40 feet long, so people get stung before they realize what has happened," he said. "They see something they haven't seen before and go to

look at it."

Falmouth rescue workers carry vinegar and Adolph's Meat Tenderizer to jellyfish calls, but generally "take people to the hospital if there is any question," Girouard said. "Some people are allergic to the stings, similar to the way some people are allergic to bee stings. We've been fortunate in that no one has gone into anaphylactic shock from a sting."

Although commonly referred to as a jellyfish, the man-of-war is an invertebrate marine animal, characterized by its bright blue color and long tendrils capable of paralyzing small fish and other prey, or raising painful blisters on human skin.

Although no stranger to the waters around the Cape and Islands, the man-of-wars generally do not arrive until later in the season, coming to this area via the Gulf Stream.

It is named for its air bladder, which early observers likened to the armed sailing vessel of old - a man o' war - under sail.

In a previous interview with the Cape Cod Times, Larry Maiden, senior scientist in the biology department at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, said the winds and the movement of recent storms may be responsible for bringing the man-of-wars earlier than usual.

There have been reports of man-of-wars spotted off Mashpee beaches, and last week a Centerville man discovered one on a Mid-Cape beach.

Five people were stung earlier this weekend on a Chilmark beach that town officials ordered temporarily closed as the remains of the potentially hazardous creatures began washing ashore there.

Dead and dying man-of-wars can be almost as hazardous as live ones, according to the experts. A dried-up carcass can attract children and curious adults because of its shiny, bright blue color. However, if touched, the man-of-war cells can adhere to the skin and sting.

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