



&lt;

Posted: Tue 8:10 PM, Sep 11, 2012

Reporter: [Betsy GoldinEmail](#)

Updated: Mon 2:31 PM, Sep 17, 2012

[Back to News](#)

## Panama City Ranked as a Top City for Illegal Dolphin Feeding

&lt;

Watching dolphins play in the waters of the gulf is a favorite past time for boaters and beach goers. Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, feeding those dolphin is illegal. However, it has been a big problem in Panama City since the 1980s.

Dolphin SMART was is a program developed by NOAA's office of National Marine Sanctuaries and National Marine Fisheries service among others.

The local businesses that follow the Dolphin SMART program want to promote responsible wildlife viewing.

Captain Hal Lacey grew up on the water, feeding the dolphins. "We did my entire childhood; it was nothing on the weekend, to come out here and feed dolphins," said Lacey. "But it never occurred to me or anyone else to feed them anything but squid or minnows. Especially not chips and peanut butter sandwiches like people do now."



Lacey is now one of two dolphin tour operators in Panama City that voluntarily follows the Dolphin SMART program, many other operators believe it will hurt their business. "A lot of the local tour operators

are banning together and starting to create their own organization and create their own guidelines for viewing and interacting with wild dolphins."

Lacey questions their motives. "If the guidelines are already established by the experts, then why is the epicenter of this area trying to create their own guidelines in order to promote what NOAA and National Marine Fisheries have designated as harmful behavior for dolphins?"

He also says following the Dolphin SMART guidelines does not affect his business negatively. "Most people are conscious. They think it's ok because the operators are doing it," Lacey said "If you explain to them why it's harmful then they agree with the ban on swimming and feeding dolphins."

Many of the tourists said it definitely did not make the trip less exciting and they appreciate knowing the harm in feeding the dolphins. "I think if it's harmful to feed them, abide by the law-don't feed them," said Jene Marie, who was visiting from Knoxville, TN.

---

[Next Story >](#)

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.wjhg.com/news/headlines/Responsible-Dolphin-Viewing-169402776.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © 2002-2010 - Gray Television Group, Inc.