Exposure Risks & Health Effects of Domoic Acid in Marine Wildlife & Humans

Kathi Lefebvre
Northwest Fisheries Science Center

Wildlife Algal-toxin Research and Response Network for the U.S. West Coast (WARRN-West)

WARRN-West and Biomedical Diagnostics

Kathi Lefebvre, Program Leader
Anne Baxter, WARRN-West Manager

Funding & Research Support

NOAA's Ocean and Human Health (OHH) Traineeship program
ECOHAB (Ecology and Oceanography of Harmful Algal Blooms) program
NOAA's Office of Protected Resources
NWFSC Research Plan Near Term Priority 5

What is WARRN-West?

Algal toxin exposure can impact the health of many marine mammals, including dolphins, whales, sea otters and sea lions. WARRN-West is a coast wide surveillance program that identifies algal toxin exposure in marine wildlife populations. We monitor for domoic acid (DA) (the toxin responsible for Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) and for saxitoxin (the most potent toxin of the Paralytic Shellfish Toxins).

The sampling network consists of federal, state, public, private, and academic partners as well as the major marine mammal stranding networks on the US West Coast. All species of marine mammals are tested and results are available in near real-time.

In a complimentary study funded by ECOHAB, a biomedical model (zebrafish) is being used to find biomarkers indicative of chronic disease caused by DA exposure. This marriage of biomedical model and field exposed sentinel species will allow for development of effective biomarkers of disease that can be used to assess "at risk" human and wildlife populations

Got Samples?

If you would like to submit marine mammal samples for testing, please contact Anne Baxter via email: anne.baxter@noaa.gov or phone: (206) 860-5606

Sample collection instructions and submission forms can be obtained here:

- Sample collection protocol
- Sample submission form*

*Submission forms are required for all samples.

Related links

Marine Mammal Stranding Network Newsletter (Winter 2010)

http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/efs/warrnwest/

Prevalence of Algal Toxins in Alaskan Marine Mammals Foraging in a Changing Arctic and Subarctic Environment

Harmful Algae 55 (2016)

Kathi A. Lefebvre[1*], Lori Quakenbush[2], Elizabeth Frame[1,3], Kathy Burek Huntington[4], Gay Sheffield[5], Raphaela Stimmelmayr[6], Anna Bryan[2], Preston Kendrick[1], Heather Ziel[7], Tracey Goldstein[8], Jonathan A. Snyder[9], Tom Gelatt[7], Frances Gulland[10], Bobette Dickerson[7], Verena Gill[9,11]

- Northwest Fisheries Science Center
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Arctic Marine Mammal Program
- Alaska Veterinary Pathology Services (AVPS)
- University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska Sea Grant, Marine Advisory Program
- North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management
- Marine Mammal Laboratory, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NOAA
- One Health Institute, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California, Davis
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marine Mammals Management
- The Marine Mammal Center
- Alaska Native Organizations: Western & Northern Coastal communities, Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, Native Villages of Gambell & Savoonga, Tribal government of St. Paul Island, whaling captains and subsistence hunters of Barrow.

Summary of Opportunistic Samples (n = 905)

- 905 marine mammals were collected between 2004-2013 and tested for the presence of algal toxins.
- Algal toxins were present in Alaskan marine mammals from SE Alaska to the Arctic Ocean.
- The data reveal that AK food webs contain algal toxins at levels that are detectable in top predators.
- **Most levels were low and health impacts were not confirmed.**

Species	Collection status	Collection period	Collection locations in Alaska (AK)	Total number of animals
Humpback	Stranded	July 2007 to Sept. 2011	Kodiak, The AK Peninsula, Southeast	8
Bowhead	Harvested	Spring & Fall 2006 to 2011	Barrow	25
Beluga	Stranded & Harvested	Sept. 2005 to Oct. 2012	Cook Inlet, Hooper Bay	15
Harbor Porpoise	Stranded	Aug. 2008 to July 2011	Cook Inlet	5
Northern Fur Seal	Harvested & Live Capture	2010	Saint George & Saint Paul Islands	179
Steller Sea Lion	Stranded	May 2004 to March 2013	Gulf of AK	42
Harbor Seal	Stranded	May 2008 to Aug. 2012	Gulf of AK, Egegik	9
Ringed Seal	Harvested	Nov. 2006 to Nov. 2012	Barrow, Chukchi Sea, Bering Sea	113
Bearded Seal	Harvested	Oct. 2007 to June 2013	Barrow, Chukchi Sea, Bering Sea	55
Spotted Seal	Harvested & Snow Urine	Nov. 2006 to Nov. 11	Barrow, Chukchi Sea, Bering Sea	158
Ribbon Seal	Harvested & Snow Urine	May 2009 to Oct. 2012	Barrow, Chukchi Sea, Bering Sea, Yakutat	21
Pacific Walrus	Harvested	May & June in 2012 & 2013	Saint Lawrence Island	82
Northern Sea Otter	Stranded & Live Capture	April 2004 to May 2011	Gulf of AK	193

SEAFOOD
Regulatory limit = 20 ug DA/g or **20,000 ng/g**

Table 1: Summary of the number of domoic acid-positive individuals from 13 species of Alaskan marine mammals, including the sample matrix with the highest concentration. F = Feces, SC = Stomach Contents, S = Serum, IC = Intestinal Contents, U = Urine.

Species	Sample number	Number positive	% positive	Max conc. (ng/g or ml)	Sample Matrix
Cetaceans					
Humpback whale	8	3	38%	51	F
Bowhead whale	25	17	68%	359	F
Beluga whale	15	2	13%	7	SC
Harbor porpoise	5	2	40%	15	F
Otariids					
Northern fur seal	179	8	5%	13.8	S
Steller sea lion	44	12	27%	7	SC
Phocids					
Harbor seal	9	6	67%	8	F
Ringed seal	113	19	17%	127	F
Bearded seal	55	14	25%	48	IC
Spotted seal	158	5	3%	40	SC
Ribbon seal	21	5	24%	7	F
Odobenids					
Pacific walrus	82	34	41%	6,457	SC
Mustelids					
Northern sea otter	172	43	25%	162	U

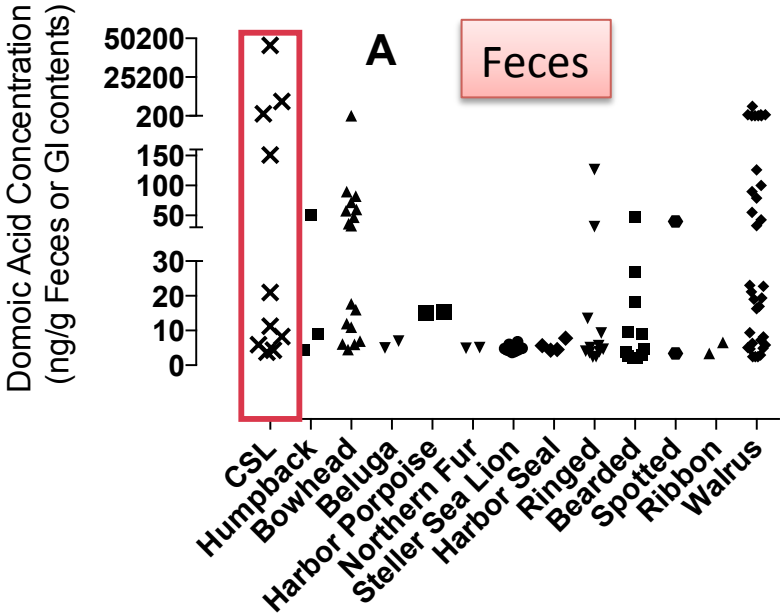
SEAFOOD
Regulatory limit = 80 ug STX/ 100 g or **800 ng/g**

Table 2: Summary of the number of saxitoxin-positive individuals from 13 species of Alaskan marine mammals, including the sample matrix with the highest concentration. F = Feces, SC = Stomach Contents, IC = Intestinal Contents, U = Urine; na = not applicable.

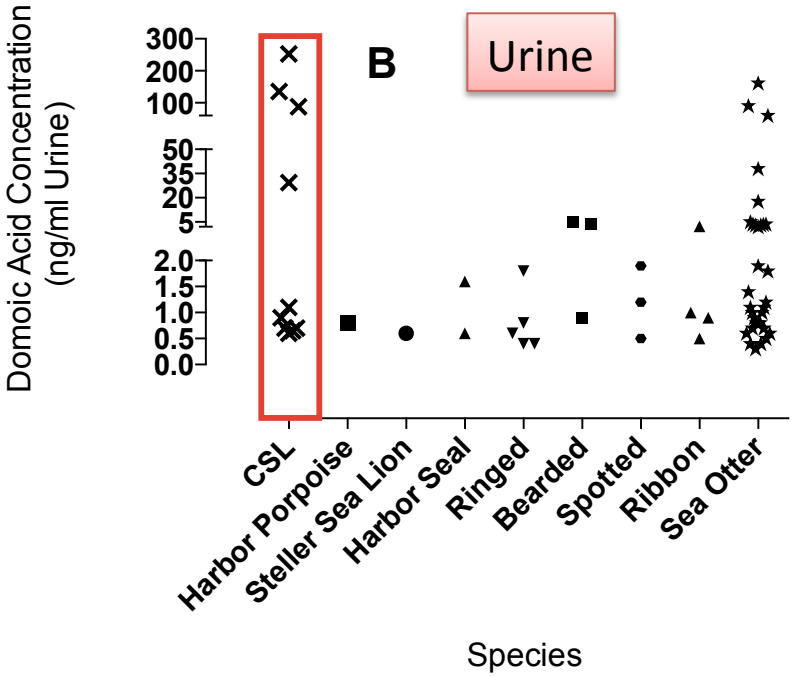
Species	Sample number	Number positive	% positive	Max conc. (ng/g or ml)	Sample Matrix
Cetaceans					
Humpback whale	8	4	50%	62	F
Bowhead whale	25	8	32%	63	F
Beluga whale	12	1	8%	4	F
Harbor porpoise	5	0	0%	na	na
Otariids					
Northern fur seal	179	8	5%	42	F
Steller sea lion	42	4	10%	7	F
Phocids					
Harbor seal	8	0	0%	na	na
Ringed seal	110	15	14%	172	F
Bearded seal	44	6	14%	15	IC
Spotted seal	145	1	1%	3	SC
Ribbon seal	7	0	0%	na	na
Odobenids					
Pacific walrus	82	23	28%	240	IC
Mustelids					
Northern sea otter	163	37	23%	45	U

Exposure risk, but what about health impacts to marine mammals?

Classic Domoic Acid Toxicosis



Feces range: **4 to 182,000 ng DA/ g**
Urine range: **0.6 to 253 ng DA/ ml**



Algal toxin impairs sea lion memory & hippocampal connectivity, with implications for strandings

Peter F. Cook[1,2,*], Colleen Reichmuth[2], Andrew A. Rouse[2], Laura A. Libby[3], Sophie E. Dennison[4], Owen T. Carmichael[5], Kris T. Kruse-Elliott[4], Josh Bloom[4], Baljeet Singh[3], Vanessa A. Fravel[6], Lorraine Barbosa[6], Jim J. Stuppino[4], William G. Van Bonn[7], Frances M. D. Gulland[6], Charan Ranganath[3]

Peter Cook & Ronan

Effects of Chronic Low Level Exposure to Domoic Acid (NIH/NSF RO1)

University of Washington

Dave Marcinek

Preston Kendrick

Bridget Ferriss

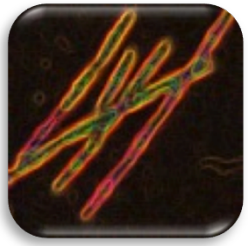
University of California, Santa Cruz

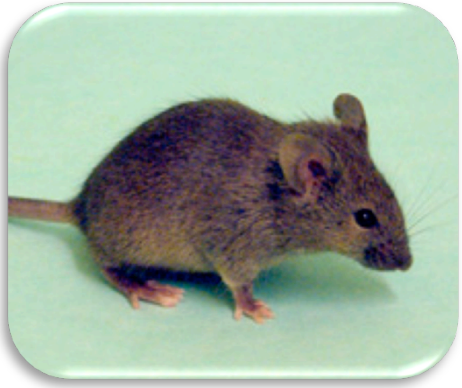
Don Smith

Yi Zuo

Emma Hiolski

Regulatory Limit = 20 ppm



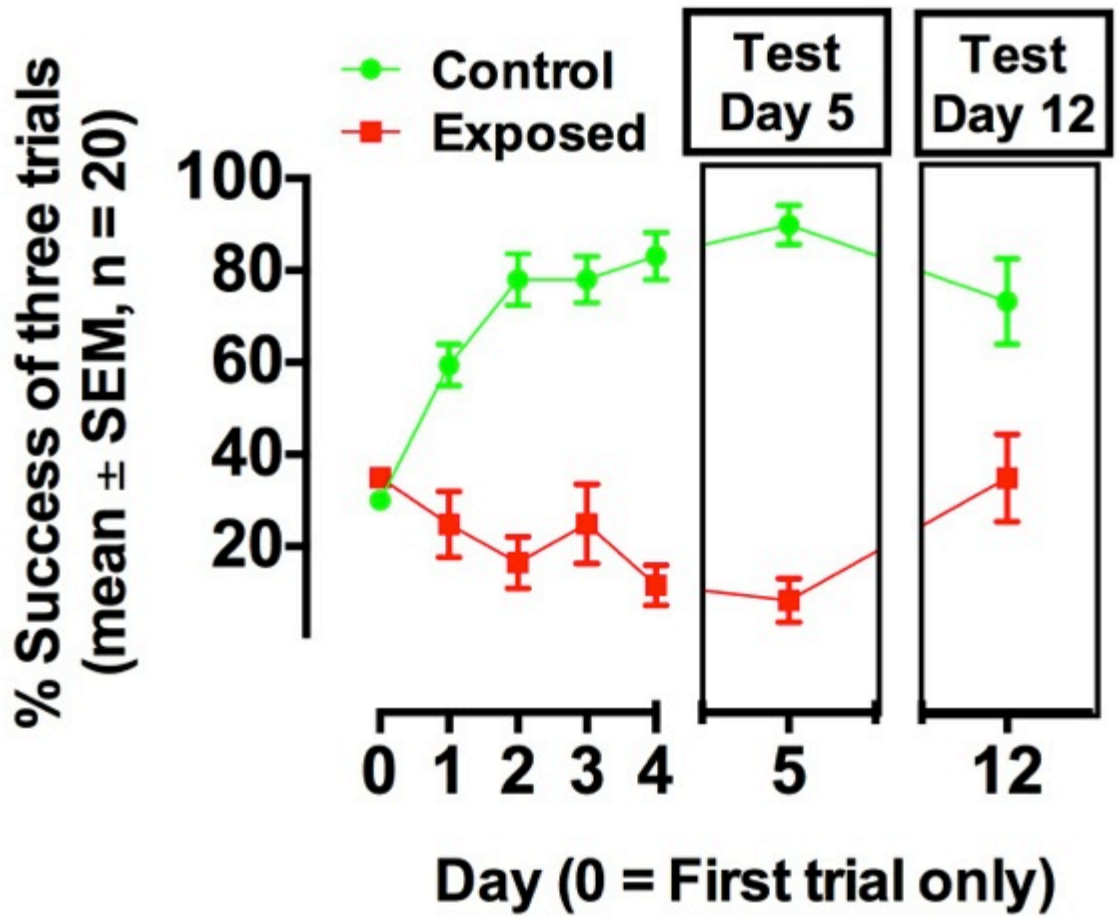


Mice were IP injected 1 X per week with 0.6 ppm domoic acid for 25 weeks (dose is 30% of EC50).

After 6 months of exposure, mice were tested for learning & memory via a Radial Water Maze test (n = 20 control & 20 exposed mice)**.**

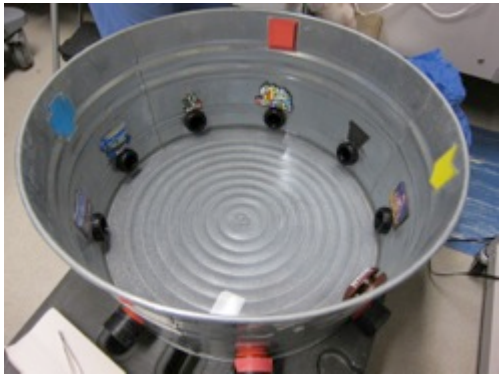
Radial Water Maze Testing Apparatus

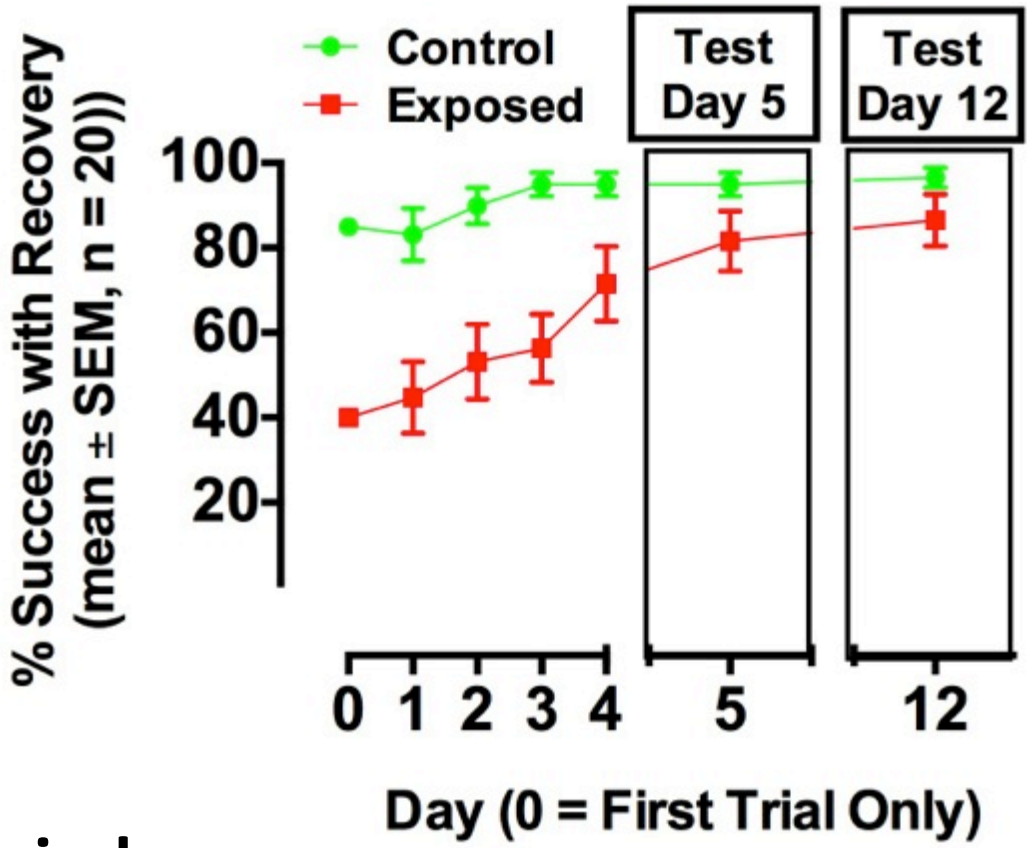
Significant Learning Deficits in Exposed Mice!



6 months of exposure

Learning Improved after 9 wk Recovery Period!

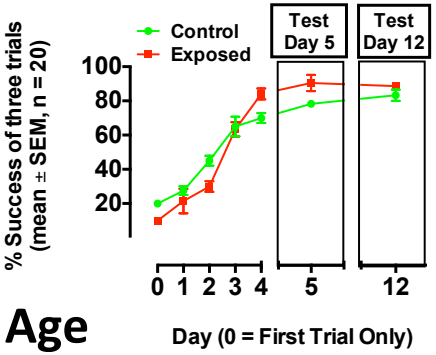




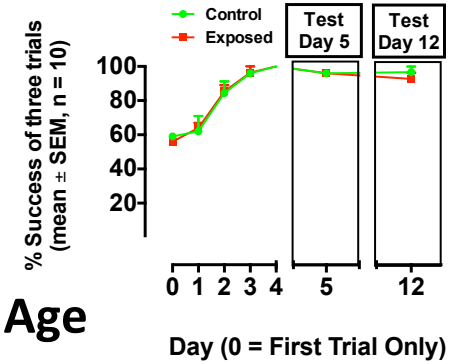
9 week recovery period

Does chronic exposure early in life impact cognitive decline with age?

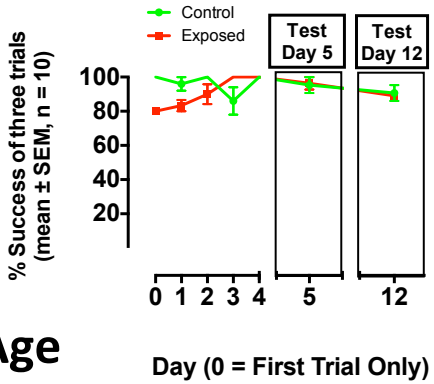
- Exposed once a week for ≈ 9 months
  - 3 to 12 months of age
- Tested at three old age time points;
  - 18 months (Early old age)
  - 24 months (Mid old age)
  - 28 months (Old old age)
- No exposure for 6, 12, and 16 months



Early Old Age

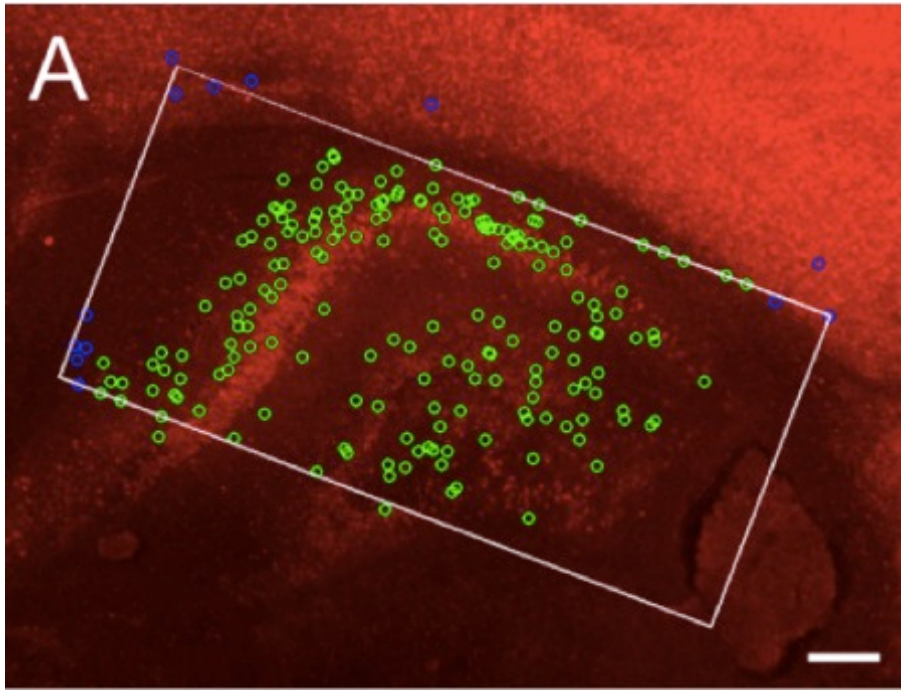


Mid Old Age



Old Old Age

Organotypic Brain Slice Cultures Mouse

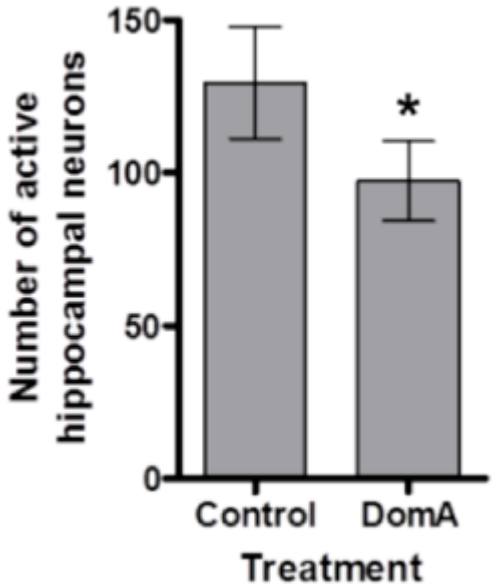


Emma Hiolski

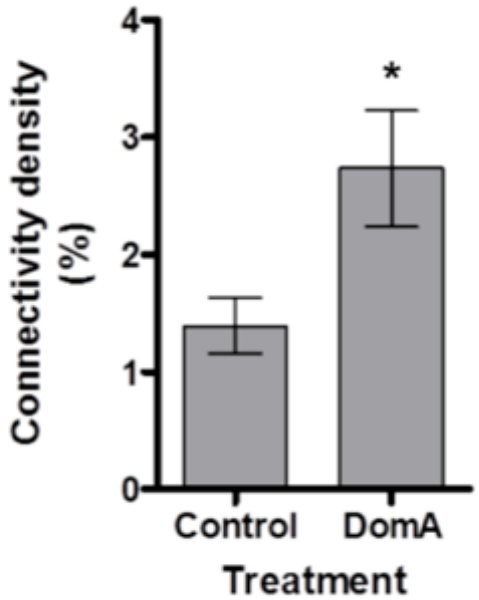
(A) Photomicrograph (x4 magnification; scale bar = 200 μm) of a representative brain slice culture (red staining = $NeuN^+$ neurons). White box highlights the region covered by the 512-electrode array, and electrophysiologically identified neurons (circles) are overlaid. Green circles = hippocampal neurons; blue circles = cortical neurons (excluded from analyses). (B) Mean (± SE) number of active hippocampal neurons in control (n=14) and domoic acid-exposed (n=15) brain slice cultures. * $p < 0.05$ (random effects ANOVA).

Electrophysiological effects of domoic acid exposure on the neural networks of organotypic brain slice cultures

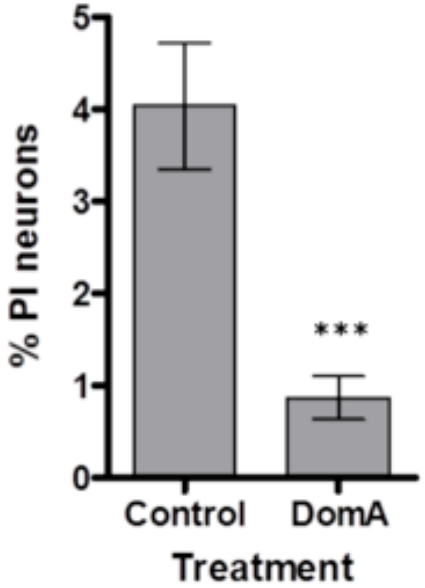
of Active Neurons



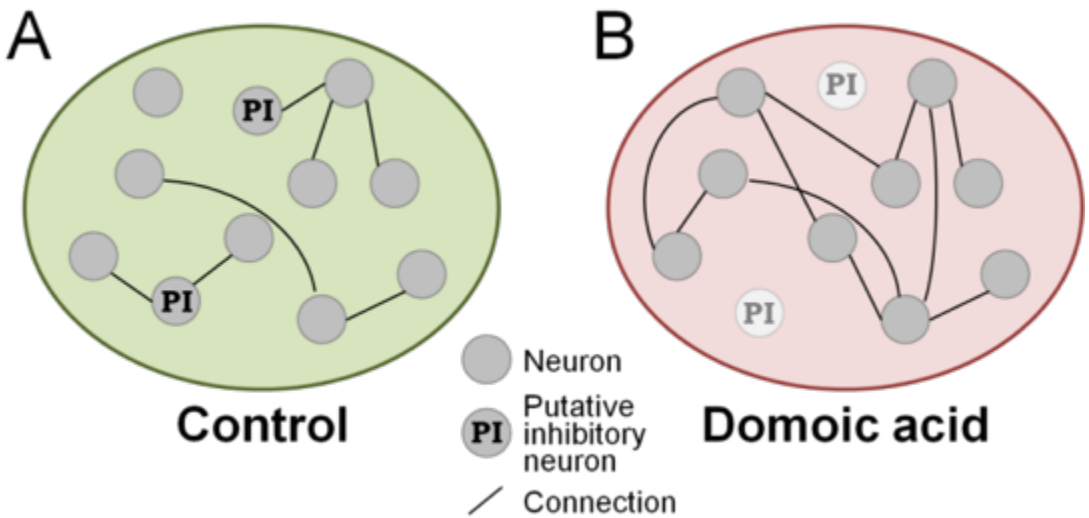
Connectivity Density



Percent Inhibitory Neurons



Model of domoic acid-induced changes in organotypic brain slice cultures



- **Loss of inhibitory neurons with chronic exposure**
- **Increased connectivity & excitatory environment**

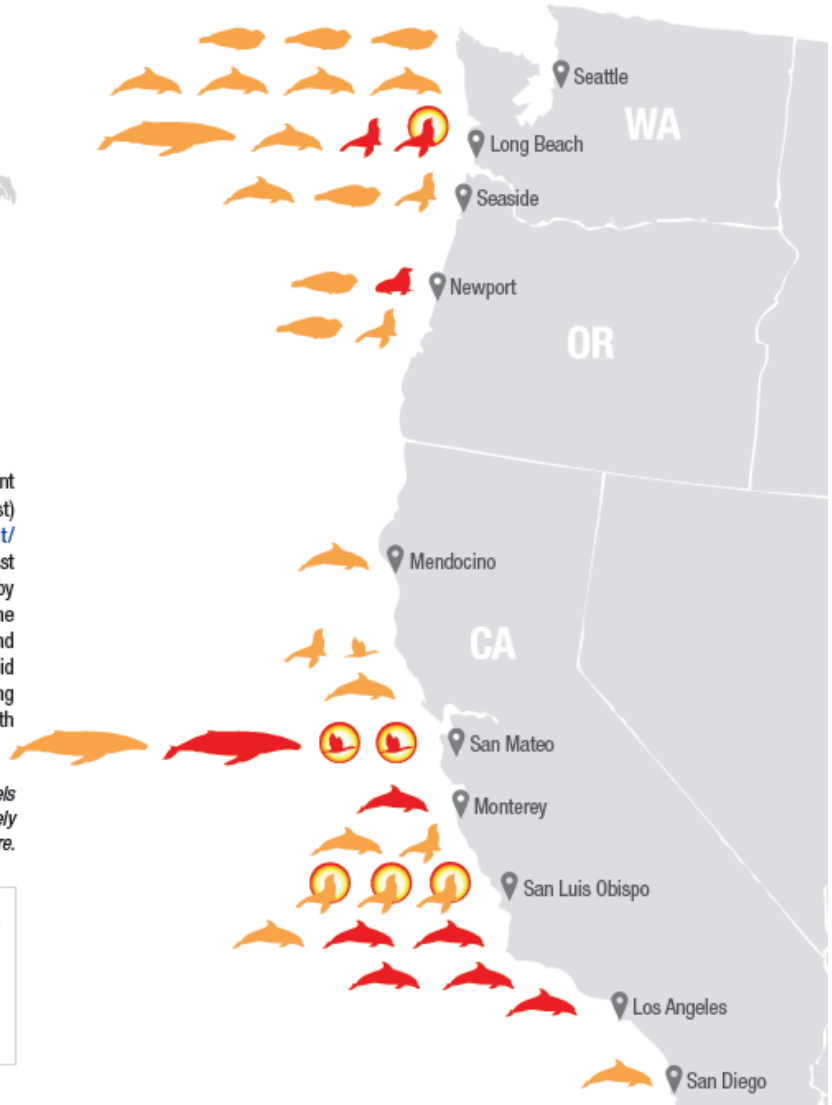
Health Impacts of Domoic Acid

- **High exposures:** seizures, death, spatial memory/ learning deficits (permanent)
- **Low exposures:** Spatial memory/learning deficits, hyperactivity (reversible)

- **Potential consequences:**
  - Decreased navigational skills, stranding impacts?
  - Increased vulnerability to ship strikes, hunters, predation?
  - Compromised foraging ability, starvation?
  - Compromised immune function, vulnerability to infectious disease?

Domoic acid detected in marine wildlife from Northern Alaska to Southern California during a record-setting bloom of toxic algae in the North Pacific in the summer of 2015

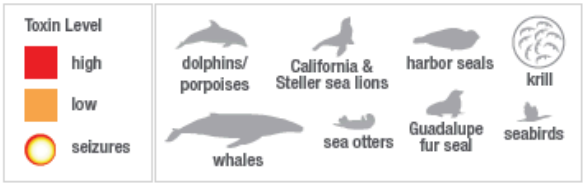
NOAA FISHERIES
Northwest Fisheries SCIENCE CENTER



WARRN-West

Following a harmful algal bloom of unprecedented geographic extent the Wildlife Algaltoxins Research and Response Network (WARRN-West) http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/efs/warrnwest/ observed a record number of animals spanning the entire US West Coast with detectable levels of domoic acid, a neurotoxin produced by the algae. The toxin was detected in krill, three seabirds, and 45 marine mammals including whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, sea lions, and sea otters. Red images represent potentially lethal levels of domoic acid and orange images represent low levels of toxin. Animals exhibiting seizures (a characteristic sign of domoic acid poisoning) are noted with a halo on the map.

Footnote: *Domoic acid is rapidly eliminated from the body so toxin levels detected in stranded, harvested or sick animals may not accurately represent the magnitude of the initial exposure.*



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WARRN-West Partners

- NOAA Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers,
- Alaska SeaLife Center,
- Cascadia Research Collective,
- Marine Mammal Institute Oregon State University,
- Portland State University,
- University of Washington,
- University of Alaska Fairbanks,
- University of California Davis One Health Institute.

ALASKA NATIVE COMMUNITIES

- NOAA West Coast & Alaska Marine Mammal Stranding Networks & Office of Protected Resources,
- North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife,
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game,
- The Marine Mammal Center,
- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife,
- Alaska SeaGrant,
- The Whale Museum of Friday Harbor,
- USGS National Wildlife Health Center,
- Alaska US Fish and Wildlife Service,
- Alaska Veterinary Pathology Service.