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## Pensacola Beach Sees First Sea Turtle Hatch of the Season

Pensacola Beach saw its first sea turtle hatch of the season last night. Approximately 129 loggerhead hatchlings emerged on the county-patrolled portion of Pensacola Beach and made their way to the Gulf of Mexico on Sunday, Aug. 9.

Sea turtles nest May through October along the Gulf Coast and nests incubate for around 60 days. Once the sun sets, hatchlings emerge all at once and make their way to the Gulf of Mexico. They will spend their first few days in a swimming frenzy to escape the many predators found in nearshore waters. Safer in the open ocean, they will use floating mats of algae to hide and feed until they are big enough to return to nearshore areas.

Sea turtle hatchlings face many threats long before they reach the water. Bright lights from homes, flashlights and cars can lead hatchlings away from the Gulf and into danger. Nearly 60% of hatchlings will be disorientated before reaching the Gulf of Mexico.

Forgotten furniture, toys, sandcastles, and holes can trap hatchlings, causing injury, starvation, and dehydration. Food and other waste left on the beach attracts gulls, crows, stray dogs, and coyotes who also prey on hatchling turtles.

Help Protect Hatchlings Turtles by Remembering:

- **Lights Out!** Both hatchlings and nesting turtles need dark beaches to find the Gulf of Mexico. Leave the flashlights and cell phones at home or use a red flashlight when on the beach at night. Turn off beach-facing lights and close windows and curtains to keep our beaches dark.
- **Leave No Trace!** Remove all furniture and toys from the beach when you're done for the day, including hammocks, tents, canopies, chairs, toys and sports equipment.

- **Stow It, Don't Throw it!** Trash and food waste can entangle turtles and other wildlife and attract unwanted predators. Always dispose of trash in the proper receptacle and refrain from feeding wildlife.

If you see a nest hatching or encounter hatchlings turtles on the beach, stay a respectful distance away and call Escambia County Marine Resources at 850- 426-1257.

For more information about sea turtles in Escambia County visit [www.myescambia.com/seaturtles](http://www.myescambia.com/seaturtles). All sea turtle work performed by Escambia County was completed under Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission permit #032.

