

Maintaining social distance between sea turtle volunteers and onlookers/public on the beach.

Sea turtle volunteers know that their presence and actions on the beach often attract the attention of the general public. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in the interest of safety of volunteers and the general public, we recommend the following actions when attending to a freshly laid nest, nest sitting, or inventorying a nest. These guidelines are in addition to the original guidelines developed at the end of April 2020 for all sea turtle volunteers.

When checking a new turtle crawl: Create a 25-ft x 25-ft social distancing perimeter box to set up (temporarily) around the nest site to keep onlookers at a safe social distance from the work site. This can be done with PVC or wooden stakes and twine, and should be ready to deploy as soon as you reach the nest area. This perimeter box not only helps to protect volunteers, but also encourages onlookers to spread out. Simple signs can be attached to posts, to explain the reasons for the perimeter.

In preparation for nest emergencies and inventories: Avoid publicizing these events through announcements, social media, etc. This will help reduce crowd size and help maintain the safety and health of the public and the volunteers.

When nest sitting and conducting an inventory: Create a 25-ft x 25-ft social distancing perimeter box around the nest site and extend it to the swash zone of the ocean to keep onlookers at a safe social distance from the work site. This can be done with PVC or wooden stakes and twine, and should be deployed as soon as you reach the nest area. The perimeter corridor may need to be adjusted with changing tides, or if emergency vehicles need to pass. At a minimum, the perimeter corridor should be removed when all volunteers exit the area at the end of the evening/night.

Overall when interacting with the public: Wear a mask when you are outside the perimeter to show all onlookers that sea turtle volunteers are taking the safety guidelines seriously. Wearing a mask also demonstrates to the general community that the sea turtle volunteers respect overall public safety. Following these guidelines will protect volunteer authorization to continue nest monitoring and protection.

If onlookers enter the perimeter, ask them to please observe from outside the ropes, and that you will come explain what is happening. If you approach them, make sure your mask is on, keep at least a 6-ft distance and explain that it is a nest site, and the perimeter is to provide social distance for the volunteers who are responsible for sea turtle nest monitoring and protection in NC.