



Rich Ambo/The Honolulu Advertiser
Some beachgoers took their chances yesterday. Box jellyfish stings are more painful than those inflicted by the Portuguese man-of-war.

Box jellyfish sting ^{7/30/97} about 800 swimmers ^{A1}

Beachgoers warned to be cautious today

By **Walter Wright**
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Surprised by a box jellyfish invasion that stung an estimated 800 swimmers yesterday, Waikiki lifeguards and police warned beachgoers to stay out of the water last night.

Preparations were being made for a return of the venomous, transparent *Carybdea alata* this morning.

Water safety officers were caught off guard because the department's expert had not expected many jellyfish in Oahu waters this month.

Last night's patrol was ordered because officials worried that many people would go to the beach to seek relief from yesterday's record-tying 92-degree heat. Box jellyfish are sensitive to light, so they will seek deep water during the day and then return to shallow waters after dark.

The city, which has no loud-speaker system on Waikiki Beach, sent lifeguards, police and volunteers out with bullhorns and police car speaker systems to warn visitors in Japanese and English.

The first warning came at Hanauma Bay. Lifeguards closed the beach there at 7:30 a.m. after they discovered large

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Jellyfish: From Hanauma Bay to Waikiki, swimmers feel stings

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numbers of jellyfish on shore. But Waikiki Beach could not be closed, Water Safety Capt. Jim Howe said, because the city does not control all access to it.

During the day, hundreds of swimmers ignored or didn't understand the yellow "jellyfish" signs and red flags posted on the beach, and one said the warnings gave him no idea he would be stung so badly.

Ambulances were called for at least two people, and at least seven people were treated at Straub Clinic and released. Police Officer Tim Tenney, at the Waikiki substation, said about 800 people were stung and many had sought treatment for shock and swelling.

Box jellyfish come to southern and western Oahu beaches nine days after a full moon. They usually are most numerous on the 10th day — yester-

day — then recede on the 11th day, records show.

But water safety Officer Landy Blair said he had forecast a light infestation yesterday because a heavy one in June had caused a record-breaking 300 stings, "and I've never seen two heavy influxes back to back," he said.

"This was a surprise, a major surprise," Blair said.

At Ala Moana Beach Park, zoologist Gail Grabowski-Kaaialii ignored the warning she had marked on her own calendar and went for a swim. "When I came out, they had the flags posted, and a lifeguard had a bucket two-thirds full with about 50 of them," she said.

Grabowski-Kaaialii, who has been studying the jellyfish cycles for years, said Hawaii needs to find out why there was a sudden influx of jellyfish in 1988 after only occasional sightings in the 1950s.

Vinegar, ice may ease sting

Home remedies such as urine, meat tenderizer, alcohol and mud are of no use to soothe the burning sting of the box jellyfish, according to Dr. Craig Thomas, an emergency room physician.

Even if the treatments work on the less-painful Portuguese man-of-war stings — and there is debate about that — they could make a box jellyfish sting worse by triggering the little bubble-like nematocysts in the tentacle to fire off more poison.

Thomas' antidote, now being subjected to scientific field testing:

- Pour vinegar on the sting to neutralize the nematocysts.
- Pick the tentacle, which resembles a rice noodle, off with your fingers.
- Apply ice to ease the pain.