

Mystery over dead iguanas

Health advisory issued

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The sudden, unexplained death of 30 green iguanas in West Bay has prompted the Department of Environmental Health to issue a public health advisory warning people not to eat the reptiles.

The phenomenon has sparked an ongoing investigation to determine the cause of the deaths and whether there is any threat to humans.

The Department of Environment plans to send a tissue sample from one of the dead iguanas this week to be tested at the Wildlife Conservation Society in New York.

Department of Environment research officer Jessica Harvey said, "We hope to find out soon. We're in the middle of paperwork and we just need to get the paperwork done."

She explained that because green iguanas fall under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, specific paperwork is required in order for the tissue samples to enter the United States.



No explanation has been determined yet for 30 iguanas found dead in West Bay.

Green iguanas are subject to restricted trade controls to protect the species from becoming endangered.

"We weren't able to find out what the cause of death was immediately, so what we are doing now is seeing if Dr. Paul Calle in New York can give us some identification on what might have caused the death," added Ms. Harvey.

Meanwhile, the department is warning people not to eat the green iguana meat – considered to be a delicacy in some parts of the community.

Tania Johnson with the Department of Environmental Health said the agency does not hold any records on how many people eat green iguana, but "from talking to people, a fair amount of people eat green iguana throughout the islands, especially people of Central American descent or background."

Director of the Blue Iguana Recovery program, Fred Burton, said further testing is needed to determine if the blue iguana population is at risk.

"That was one of our concerns, the danger of it crossing to the blue iguanas. But we

don't even know that it's a disease, it might be poisoning, it could be a viral thing, we really don't have an idea," said Mr. Burton. The phenomenon was first reported on April 28, after some people found dead iguanas scattered around near Vulgunners Pond in West Bay.

"There were a lot of dead ones found there that had dried up ... The people who reported it said [the iguanas] got sick first and were just inactive, and didn't run away from people, and the next morning they were dead," said Mr. Burton.

Ms. Harvey said the iguanas were "all varying sizes of animals, between juvenile to adult and some were buried previously before we arrived."

The DoE is asking residents who notice any other dead iguanas to call 949-8469.

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