

# Did red tide kill a 26-foot long whale shark in Florida?

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What killed a 26-foot whale shark that washed up in southwest Florida?

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That's what officials from the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission are looking into after the large shark was found on Sanibel Island.

FWC's Dr. Gregg Poulakis and Dr. Jose Castro of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration performed a necropsy on the [whale shark](#), which is believed to be a male about 26-foot feet long, according to the FWC, which posted photos of the shark Wednesday.

"It was fairly fresh or newly deceased (not heavily decomposed)," the commission said.

The investigation is part of a response to an outbreak of red tide algae bloom that has been impacting all forms of marine life off southwest Florida. A FWC biologist also recently performed a necropsy on a goliath grouper. Red tide is a higher-than-normal concentration of algal bloom (microscopic plantlike organisms) that can be toxic.

Red [tide](#) has killed at least 287 sea turtles since October. Earlier this week, [red tide](#) was suspected in the death of a Kemp's ridley turtle in Siesta Key, off Sarasota.

Whale sharks are common off Florida's coasts, where boaters and fisherman have spotted them.

The largest species of sharks, which can weigh about 20 tons, are known for eating plankton and other small squid and fish. A recent study by researchers at Nova Southeastern University's Guy Harvey Research Institute and the Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme, a nonprofit whale shark research group, found that the gentle giants can grow as much as 61 feet long and live as long as 130 years.

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