

ARE THE CRAB DYING?



No - this is not a massive die off of crab. In order to grow, a crab must “molt” or shed its shell. In the late spring to early summer, Oregon crab go through molting. Afterwards, these empty shells often wash up on the beaches in large numbers.



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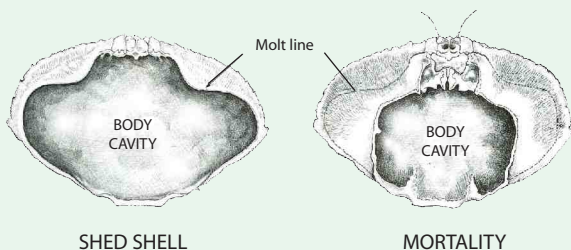


In their first 2 years, Dungeness crab molt as many as 6 times a year! As they become mature (at age 3), this slows to about once a year.

When preparing to molt, a crab's old shell separates from the new one beneath by splitting at their "molt line," located on the bottom half of the carapace, near the edge. The new and extremely soft crab now has the flexibility to back out of its old shell. During this incredible feat, crab are extremely vulnerable to predators so the process is done quickly. Soon after the live crab has exited (the larger, green crab in above photo), they bury themselves in sand to allow their new shell to harden.

When a crab sheds its shell, it leaves behind remnants of all the hard parts including the covering of the legs, gills, eyestalks, antennae, and the body.

The easiest way to tell the difference between the shell of a dead crab and a molted shell is to check the molt line.



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