



NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

July 8, 2026
Agenda Item No. 7.4

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

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TITLE: Harbormaster Update – June 2026 Activities

ABSTRACT:

June 2026 was a busy and productive month for the Harbor Department, marked by significant activity across all three pillars of our mission: keeping Newport Harbor clean, safe, and well-enjoyed. The Department assumed management responsibility for slips and garages at Balboa Yacht Basin (BYB), a milestone transition that is already yielding measurable improvements in service delivery and facility conditions. Water quality remained a priority, with staff responding to multiple spill reports, advancing the oyster garden program, and celebrating an anecdotal but encouraging sign of ecological health — an adolescent octopus photographed swimming at Marina Park. On the safety front, a significant enforcement action resulted in the arrest of an unpermitted charter operator on an outstanding warrant, and staff conducted numerous rescues, assists, and educational interventions throughout the month. The "Well-Enjoyed" category reflects a harbor humming with summer activity, with staff going above and beyond to assist boaters, enforce public dock rules, and ensure commercial operators comply with Marine Activities Permit (MAP) requirements.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
- 2) Receive and file.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS:

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

DISCUSSION:

The Harbor Department's monthly activity reports to the Harbor Commission are organized around the Department's core mission: keeping Newport Harbor clean, safe, and well-enjoyed. This framework has been consistently applied in prior reports and provides the Commission with a structured view of operational priorities and outcomes.

The June 2026 report reflects the Department's first full month of operational responsibility at Balboa Yacht Basin, a transition that was anticipated as early as the May 2026 report, which noted the likelihood of a July 1 takeover date — or June 1 if the office could be made operational in time. That transition occurred, and its effects are evident throughout this report. The referenced unpermitted charter enforcement matter has been ongoing in some capacity since 2023, and the City filed a misdemeanor complaint on March 18, 2026, alleging 12 counts.

Clean

Significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the cleanliness of Newport Harbor during June 2026. The month opened with an encouraging ecological signal: an image was captured of an adolescent octopus swimming at Marina Park — an anecdotal but meaningful indicator of improving water quality in the harbor. Staff continued to foster the oyster garden with bi-weekly sun baths, an ongoing initiative supporting natural water filtration.

Staff responded to multiple reports of oil and fuel spills throughout the harbor, with particular attention to the mooring fields. A diesel sheen was reported between the Pavilion and Washington Public Dock, and a separate diesel spill was observed between E and D docks at the Balboa Yacht Basin (BYB). All relevant departments and agencies were notified with contacts and report numbers. The Harbor Department's response to the E/D dock spill — with nearly the entire department arriving on scene — is a testament to the team's commitment to water quality and the safety of this beautiful place.

Additional water quality enforcement actions included fishing enforcement at West Jetty View Park and the curbing of unpermitted fishing from the docks at BYB. C-dock piling cap mold removal was completed. A tenant at BYB was confronted after tossing fish carcasses overboard following a 48-hour fishing tournament; the tenant skimmed the area and nothing remained in the bay. Note: fish should be gutted and bagged offshore, not in a slip.

Trash cleanup at Washington Public Dock was carried out by HSOs. Video footage at 15th Street is being reviewed to identify suspects responsible for illegal dumping. Two West Marine 12V batteries were found dumped on 19th Street and were brought back to base for proper disposal.

Significant improvements were made to the cleanliness of facilities at BYB, including railings, docks, dock boxes, trash skimmers, trash receptacles, the hazardous waste collection station, and the recycling center. Cleaning the two trash skimmers at BYB is a daily necessity. With consistent attention and improved technique, the process — which previously required up to two hours per skimmer — has been reduced to less than 30 minutes each.

Debris removal from BYB is now being included in the harbor's weight totals. The BYB Dockmaster has noted with pride: "My numbers will be hard to beat."

It has come to the Department's attention that a significant amount of hazardous material that is not used motor oil is being improperly deposited at the used oil recycling station at BYB. Staff is actively working to identify a service provider capable of managing the broader range of hazmat materials being left at that location.

Safe

Efforts were expended to maintain and improve the safety of Newport Harbor during June 2026. The month's most notable enforcement action involved the arrest of an unpermitted charter operator on a warrant for failing to appear in a civil abatement case. The case alleges that the unpermitted charter operator continues to offer, schedule, advertise, arrange, and/or provide his vessel for charter or rental in Newport Harbor without a Marine Activities Permit, in violation of NBMC 17.10.020. The City filed a misdemeanor complaint on March 18, 2026, alleging a total of 12 counts. It should be noted that this matter has been ongoing in some capacity since 2023. While on routine patrol on June 13, the unpermitted charter operator was observed operating his vessel on Newport Harbor. At the conclusion of the unpermitted charter, the operator returned his vessel to the launch ramp where two uniformed NB police officers took him into custody on the outstanding criminal warrant for failing to appear in court. We are grateful for the assist from our colleagues in PD.

Additional enforcement actions included a \$1,000 fine and Notice of Violation (NOV) posted for an illegal charter observed making use of the Rhine Wharf. An NOV was issued for a vessel tied to another vessel secured to a dock. An electrical code violation and a significant hazard were addressed in the Grand Canal. Speeders were corrected on multiple occasions. HSOs successfully deterred several dozen potential bridge jumpers.

West anchorage buoys were repositioned and tackle left on the sea floor was removed. Several mooring assists were performed including for M/Y Sandella and S/V Lemoncello, all of which went smoothly.

At BYB, staff introduced themselves to and developed rapport with service providers working on tenant vessels, with ongoing work to improve indemnification and risk reduction protocols.

"Operation Chill," whereby worthy recipients receive certificates for free slushies at a local retailer, continued in June, with HSOs educating kids on wearing life vests and staff educating youth on fishing in the harbor.

A man and an infant who fell off a stand-up paddleboard (SUP) in the main channel were escorted back to Mother's Beach, educated on safe practices, and assisted in cleaning up their gear. Two paddle boarders and two dogs in distress due to wind, tide, and fatigue were assisted back to the safety of 15th Street. Two kayakers who flipped over were assisted — neither was wearing a life vest, and one was having difficulty swimming. A

kayaker who reported low blood sugar was assisted; sugary snacks were provided by request, the kayaker was returned to his rental area, and medical assistance was offered and declined.

An OCC sailing vessel in distress due to a broken rigging and separated from its group was assisted and towed back to safety at the OCC base. A rental electric vessel became wrapped on the Mother's Beach swim line and a diver was dispatched in addition to notifying the rental company operator. A hit-and-run incident in which a rented electric vessel damaged a Lido (LICA) shore mooring was addressed; information was collected on the scene.

Unpermitted refrigeration units being used in the upland garages at BYB triggered an alarm. This issue appears to be more widespread than previously understood and may warrant further review by the Commission. Video footage at BYB is also being reviewed to identify suspected vandals who damaged the canvas covers of a tenant vessel.

Well-enjoyed

Significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the enjoyment of Newport Harbor during June 2026. The Harbor Department formally assumed management responsibility for slips and garages at Balboa Yacht Basin, a transition that represents significant cost savings and anticipated improvement in service delivery to tenants.

- An HSO was assigned to assist a BYB tenant with an electrical issue, which was resolved at 3:55 p.m. — a task that would not have been possible under the prior management arrangement, and one that is contributing to an estimated savings of \$175,000 per year. Staff also curbed unpermitted parking at BYB by residents and guests of the adjacent community.
- In an example of platinum customer service delivery, a lost dinghy belonging to a mooring permittee was found at Opal Public Dock and returned to the permittee's vessel in the C Field.
- The East Anchorage was temporarily re-established with proper notification via Local Notice to Mariners.
- HSOs at BYB assisted two vessels back into their slips while passing by — the vessel operators were very appreciative.
- First aid was administered to the owner of a permittee in the J Field.
- A complaint of a generator running all night in the A Field was addressed through several patrol checks at various hours and significant interaction with the nearby complaining resident
- A 55-foot vessel on Central Public Dock received a citation issued by a Code Enforcement Officer and hand-delivered
- Another larger boat violation at a public dock was addressed. The vessel made fast was well over the 14-foot limit in that section of the 19th Street public dock

- A creative NOV was placed on a dinghy moored to the seawall at Promenade Bay. The owner had apparently gone to a restaurant across Bayside Drive and left the vessel tied to the seawall
- An unpermitted charter vessel well-known to the Department was observed loading passengers at the Balboa Marina Public Dock. Staff reminded the operator of MAP requirements and the prohibition on the use of public docks for commercial purposes. The upland landlord is being encouraged to better patrol and enforce restrictions in their parking lot.

Odds and Ends

Significant efforts were expended to address harbor-related matters that do not fit neatly within the clean, safe, and well-enjoyed framework.

A Western Gull nest dumped at the 15th Street Dock refuse area was discovered and investigated in coordination with Animal Control.

The most noteworthy — and, frankly, disappointing — interaction of the month involved a constituent who has, on several occasions, written pointed and disparaging emails questioning why mooring permittees are not provided shoreboat service. The Harbormaster has responded on multiple occasions, detailing previous efforts to establish water taxi and/or shoreboat service in Newport Harbor and the barriers and challenges encountered by previous proposers. In the presence of a current effort to develop a proposal for such a service, the Harbormaster asked the proposer to consider input and functional requirements from several harbor stakeholders to ensure robust demand for whatever services are proposed. The proposer enthusiastically agreed and asked for support in connecting with such constituents. Among the connections the Harbormaster attempted to facilitate was this very constituent — someone who had previously been encouraged to engage constructively and collaboratively in suggesting improvements to the harbor. The response from the constituent was a deafening silence. The Harbormaster notes this disappointment for the record, as it reflects a missed opportunity for meaningful stakeholder engagement on a matter the constituent has previously felt strongly about.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the Harbor Commission find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA

Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the Harbor Commission considers the item).

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Harbor Department Statistics Infographic