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NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

February 11, 2026
Agenda Item No. 6.6

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION
FROM: Paul Blank, Harbormaster
pblank@newportbeachca.gov
(949) 270-8159
TITLE: Harbormaster Update – January 2026 Activities

ABSTRACT:

The Harbormaster oversees the City Harbor Department and is responsible for the management of the City's mooring fields and Balboa Yacht Basin marina, support for the Harbor Commission, municipal code enforcement on the harbor, events and marine activities permitting, safety and rescue operations, management of the Marina Park visitor serving marina, marine sanitation pump out equipment and public pier maintenance, water quality monitoring and maintenance, impound and disposition of abandoned and unclaimed vessels and public relations and information dissemination on and about Newport Harbor as well as several special projects.

This report will update the Harbor Commission and the public on the Harbor Department's recent activities.

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 following is a summary of Harbor Department activities for January 2026. The summary of activities is organized referencing the department's mission of keeping Newport Harbor clean, safe, and well-enjoyed.

Clean

Harbor Safety Officers (HSOs) and Code Enforcement Officers (CEOs) responded to several environmental and cleanliness-related issues throughout the month of January, demonstrating continued vigilance in protecting harbor water quality and aesthetics.

When a heavy sheen was observed and promptly reported, HSOs coordinated with the Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Patrol to search for a source. As a precaution, OCSD deployed a containment boom around a vessel.

In another instance, once a well-publicized upland oil leak was confirmed contained, HSOs removed a containment boom from the Balboa Coves, cleaned and restocked for use on a future incident.

Staff addressed multiple fuel and hydraulic fluid discharge instances, including a gasoline leak from a tender at the Fernando Street Public Dock. HSOs secured the fuel line and notified the owner. In another instance, a hydraulic fluid leak at the Balboa Yacht Basin was investigated. The dredger working in that area was determined to be the cause of the discharge. The crew did deploy a containment boom and absorbent material in response. HSOs learned that this particular hydraulic fluid was biodegradable. Let's hope biodegradable fluids become more standard in the future.

Numerous debris and hazardous material responses were completed, including removal of excessive trash from 19th Street Public Dock, transport of HAZMAT materials to the Municipal Yard per protocol, and disposal of abandoned materials encountered during routine patrols.

Significant progress was made on abandoned and surrendered vessels. A 56' Hatteras motor vessel was removed from the harbor and destroyed after consuming significant resources since the beginning of October. Another 40' wooden vessel that had been abandoned in the harbor was also removed and destroyed. A third problematic vessel in the harbor (43' motor vessel) was finally surrendered to the City through the Vessel Turn-In Program (VTIP) after significant negotiations with the Harbor Department. As part of those negotiations, the former owner will take financial responsibility for removal and destruction costs.

HSOs working at a variety times throughout the day and night carried out an investigation on a suspected unpermitted live-aboard in the A mooring field. The complaint was initiated by a nearby resident on the Balboa Peninsula. After observations over the course of several days and nights revealed no evidence of habitation, the complaint was resolved. HSOs were commended for their thorough documentation and follow-through on this complaint.

Safe

Significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the safety of the harbor, with an emphasis on focused on navigation safety, infrastructure integrity, and code compliance.

Harbor safety operations were particularly active in January, with staff de-watering numerous vessels during multiple shifts. These efforts included pumping approximately 500 gallons of water from a vessel on South Bay Front, dewatering vessels on shore moorings around Lido Isle, and responding to multiple vessels taking on water throughout the harbor.

One major incident involved a 44-foot power vessel in the J mooring field experiencing generator raw-water intake failure, overwhelming bilge pumps, and placing the vessel at risk of sinking. Harbor Department staff deployed pumps, stopped the water intrusion, and stabilized the vessel. This represents a significant upgrade of the Department's skills and equipment in responding to such situations. We're not interested in taking business away from the commercial vessel assist services available in the harbor, but in this case, we were able to get to the vessel in peril and execute remediation more quickly than any other provider, avoiding a more serious situation for the vessel and the harbor.

Staff provided extensive traffic control and escort services, including assistance to tug-and-barge operations through congested harbor conditions and escorting barges to the open ocean during negative tide conditions.

Harbor Department vessels also provided security and traffic control for City-contracted divers near Balboa Yacht Club, working on an underwater force main between Bayside Drive and Little Balboa Island.

Additional safety actions included towing a City recreation sailboat back to Marina Park when it became becalmed, assisting a paddleboarder in distress at 19th Street Public Dock, and educating vessel operators on unsafe operations and personal flotation device requirements for children.

HSOs also conducted navigation light enforcement during fog conditions, addressed the now year-round sea lion intrusion challenge in the A mooring field, and reported the deteriorating condition of Navigation Marker 10 to the US Coast Guard.

Training and preparedness efforts continued with stability training presented to staff, as well as standpipe testing and vessel fire training conducted jointly with the Newport Beach Fire Department.

Well-enjoyed

Significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the enjoyment of the harbor while minimizing impacts to safety and navigation.

Ensuring fair access and compliance with the codes and laws remains central to maintaining a harbor that is well-enjoyed by all users.

HSOs addressed numerous unauthorized mooring and dock use cases, including impoundment of vessels without assignments, but making use of various moorings. As

well, several oversized vessels were documented and addressed at the 15th Street Public Dock. Ongoing enforcement actions at Central Public Dock and follow-up on a dock-hopping vessel previously removed from 19th Street were also carried out.

HSOs monitored and enforced anchorage regulations, including directing a vessel to return to within West Anchorage boundaries and reminding the operator of Special Circumstances Anchorage expiration requirements.

Public dock management improvements continued with the installation of consistent and more permanent time-zone plaques.

Other notable actions included recovery of lost keys at the 15th Street Public Dock through coordinated teamwork and impoundment of repeatedly abandoned dinghies exceeding allowable dock time limits.

Staff also conducted a survey of conditions in the Grand Canal with an emphasis on achieving compliance with pier and mooring limits.

The contractor responsible for the recent rebuild of public docks has returned to address items on a punch list. While those items are being addressed, HSOs are taking the opportunity refurbish and refinish many of the blue and white finials that indicate the location of the public docks.

Odds and Ends

Significant efforts were expended to address harbor-related matters other than cleanliness, safety, and enjoyment.

Harbor Department leadership participated in an extensive and complex review of bids and interviews with potential Balboa Yacht Basin marina management service providers. At the City Council Planning Session, direction was given to pursue a plan by which the Harbor Department would become responsible for the management of the marina and garages. It is believed the plan will provide tenants and potential tenants with improved service and significant cost savings over the commercial service providers.

An inquiry was received from the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control regarding a proposed ABC license at a waterfront location for alcohol sales aboard a charter vessel. The application was denied as there is no approved charter provider at that waterfront location. Staff will continue to monitor slips for the arrival of any unpermitted vessels.

The most amusing public inquiry of the month occurred when a constituent requested the Harbormaster address concerns related to playground equipment at Marina Park. The constituent was advised that playground facilities fall under Recreation and Senior Services; however, the Harbormaster offered to coordinate with the appropriate

department on their behalf—an example of the wide-ranging (and occasionally unexpected) nature of harbor-related inquiries.

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