



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

November 12, 2025
Agenda Item No. 6.7

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

FROM: Paul Blank, Harbormaster, (949) 270-8159
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TITLE: Harbormaster Update – October 2025 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 Harbor Department is pleased to provide the following summary of departmental activities for September 2025, the department's mission of keeping Newport Harbor **CLEAN, SAFE, and WELL-ENJOYED.**

Clean

Underwater cleanup activities were successfully completed, resulting in the removal of several hundred debris items from the harbor floor. Six marine animals—four octopi, one tube worm, and one crab—were safely released. Other significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the cleanliness of the harbor. Highlights included:

- Following recent training for Harbor Safety Officers (HSOs) and Code Enforcement Officers (CEOs), Construction Site Best Management Practices were communicated to several harborside and harbor adjacent construction sites
- HSOs collected a large accumulation of debris near 19th Street
- HSOs conducted an early-morning vessel save at the American Legion Yacht Club; approximately 500 gallons of water were pumped out
- Continued management of the now-abandoned M/V “New Beginnings”. The vessel was impounded after taking on water. Approximately 350 gallons of diesel fuel, 21 marine batteries (approx. 1,000 pounds), and multiple barrels of hazardous materials were removed by the U.S. Coast Guard contractor. The vessel will be destroyed once the vessel title is cleared. Slip fees, towing fees and environmental response fees remain unpaid. City Social Services placed the former occupant in a local motel while he awaits placement in a local Homeless Shelter
- HSOs responded to a high volume of debris following the recent storm (“first flush”)
- HSOs worked with a mooring permittee in the H field to mitigate a minor gasoline leak on a dinghy
- A brownish substance in the H & J mooring field was investigated and determined to be storm runoff and organic material
- The Harbor Department participated in the response to methane and oil seepage at a Marcus Avenue property; containment booms remain in place and effective
- Issued a Stop Work Order at a construction site on Via Lido Nord that was allowing debris from the construction activity to enter the harbor. Activity resumed, and the Stop Work Order was removed when proper collection techniques and containment barriers were put in place

Safe

Significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the safety of the harbor. Highlights included:

- Training and Preparedness
 - Harbor staff completed CPR, AED, and First Aid training with instruction from the Lifeguard Division.
 - HSOs received crew fatigue and human lift training.
- Enforcement and Safety Incidents
 - Impounded a stolen Boston Whaler discovered in unauthorized use of a shore mooring. We worked with NBPD to return to the owner
 - Investigated dock lighting complaints (no violations found).
 - Assisted a vessel belonging to a permittee not otherwise assigned to a mooring to safety and security as the owner addresses operability
 - Enforced safety zones during the underwater clean-up and another event in the harbor for the visually impaired
 - Rescued a permittee in the A field who had fallen overboard and was entangled in his painter; successful recovery without injury
 - Conducted speeding enforcement on several occasions
 - Continued early morning “Dawn Patrol” operations; numerous violations observed and documented
 - Provided an extended four-hour security zone for an event at the Bay Club associated with the Newport Beach Film Festival
 - Assisted Department of Homeland Security in the custody transfer of a Private Party Impound vessel from a commercial marina
 - Investigated unpermitted dock construction and issued a Stop Work Order until proper permits are obtained
 - Assisted a 30’ motor vessel with steering failure back to a local yacht club
 - Assisted a privately owned disabled electrical vessel

Well-enjoyed

Significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the enjoyment of the harbor. Highlights included:

- A member of the public sent a note of appreciation for the compassionate assistance provided by Harbor staff during a mechanical failure on the water

- Continued monitoring of potential unpermitted charter operations, including several vessels, and continued coordination and cooperation with the USCG Enforcement resources in Sector LA/Long Beach
- East anchorage Bravo buoy became entangled under a large vessel near Bay Island Bridge
- Supported public safety and event logistics at the Bay Club

Odds and Ends

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

- Transitioned Mooring Permit Transfer Applications to the City's EnerGov online system, aligning with other Harbor-related applications (Mooring Licenses, Special Events, Rhine Wharf Use, Marine Activities). This upgrade significantly improves service efficiency for both staff and permittees.
- Published updated and comprehensive training materials for Harbor Department staff. These materials represent a major investment of time and expertise and demonstrate remarkable organizational maturity for a relatively young department.
- Code Enforcement Officer Jeffrey Goldfarb was named the 2025 California Code Enforcement Officer of the Year by the California Association of Code Enforcement Officers. Officer Goldfarb has been instrumental in developing the Harbor Code Enforcement program, establishing interagency partnerships, and advancing training and abatement programs.
- The electric patrol vessel received a steering system upgrade, improving maneuverability and reducing energy use per shift.
- A member of the public requested more information related to a comment made at the September Harbor Commission meeting about efforts to increase revenue for the Harbor Department. The Harbor Department has considered and rejected several opportunities to increase revenue, including selling branded merchandise from our office. The Harbor Department has engaged in other specific efforts to increase revenue, some of which are merely cost recovery, in several ways, including:
 - Increasing occupancy for visitor stays at Marina Park (increase existing source of revenue)

- Increasing occupancy for visitor stays on off-shore mooring sub-permits (increase existing source of revenue)
- Making sub-permits on onshore moorings available (new source of revenue)
- Increasing utilization of the Harbor Event Permitting process (increase existing source of revenue)
- Increasing utilization and fees for use of the Large Vessel Anchorage (increase existing source of revenue)
- Adding fees for new services offered by the Harbor Department, including:
 - Use and permitting of the Rhine Wharf
 - Use or consumption of City-owned equipment and supplies at Marina Park
 - Mooring licenses
 - Group/Exclusive use of the Marina Park marina
 - After-hours mooring assists

There were several phone calls that vied for the “Most Amusing Call of the Month.” The top three were:

1. The “99% Boat Owner” Case:

An attorney representing a 99% owner of a vessel moored in the harbor called to inquire about his client’s “rights” over the 1% owner, who is the sole mooring permittee, and the mooring permit. The Harbormaster explained that mooring permits are transferable with City approval and that ownership percentage has no bearing on permit rights. Further, without being named as a permittee on the mooring permit, a majority vessel owner has no rights or privileges related to the mooring. Lastly the attorney was educated about the process for his client to become a “second permittee” at no cost or the “primary permittee” through a mooring transfer

2. The Flag Complaint:

A caller reported “desecrated flags” visible from the Newport Boulevard Bridge and demanded that the Harbormaster do something about it immediately. Upon inspection, the Harbormaster found both flags to be fairly new, not in any kind of disrepair, and on private property meaning outside the jurisdiction or responsibility of the City

3. After-Hours Tow Request:

The Harbormaster received a personal text message after hours from a boater requesting a tow for a disabled privately owned electric vessel. It seems the owner/operator lacked an arrangement with a commercial tow service. The Harbormaster advised that, if resources could be made available, an after-hours City assist would come with a \$206 fee. The request was promptly withdrawn

Conclusion

The Harbor Department continues to make progress in its mission to ensure Newport Harbor remains clean, safe, and well-enjoyed. This month's activities reflect strong interdepartmental collaboration, environmental stewardship, public service, and professional recognition.

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