



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

September 10, 2025
Agenda Item No. 6.5

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

FROM: Paul Blank, Harbormaster - (949) 270-8159,
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TITLE: Harbormaster Update – August 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 continued delivering on its mission to keep Newport Harbor clean, safe, and well-enjoyed during the very busy month of August.

Clean

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

- While attaching signage to a newly rebuilt public dock, Harbor Safety Officers (HSO) observed new holes drilled in the decking to serve as fishing rod holders. Observing an angler nearby with a cordless drill and hole saw, the HSOs made contact and confirmed the angler was responsible for the new holes and planned to make more. A citation for vandalism was issued
- A young woman dropped her phone off the Lido bridge. HSOs on patrol in the area called a diver and provided support while the retrieval operation was carried out
- Disused bean bag furniture from a vessel was observed discharging into the bay. We collected the debris and sent a Notice of Violation (NOV) to the vessel owner
- Chris Miller provided (and will continue to provide at Harbor Commission meetings) an update on upcoming dredging projects in the harbor:
 - The large-scale Army Corps project managed by the City should begin in late Fall, perhaps around the first of October
 - The Linda Isle Lagoon project has been approved, and a contractor has been selected. Still waiting to hear a tentative start date
 - The Balboa Yacht Basin (BYB) dredging project is out for bid. A bidder meeting was conducted at the site to review conditions in August. The project will likely start in late December or right after the first of the New Year
 - All projects are aware of and know not to be active during or interfere with the Christmas Boat Parade, December 17 - 21
- Based on complaints from a nearby resident, the enforcement of the fishing prohibition at West Jetty View Park was carried out. Several verbal warnings were issued to adults and minors. We have moved on to issuing written warnings
- An early morning patrol observed a fuel spill in the Newport Dunes Marina. We were unable to identify a source, but did record the location of an empty slip for further investigation. Proper notifications were made to Cal OES, NRC, and OCSD
- A call from a vessel owner in the Balboa Coves requested assistance with dewatering a vessel. HSO's pumped approximately 400 gals of clean water out of the bilge. Once refloated, the vessel was hauled out
- Several written warnings for fishing at the Balboa Marina Public Dock were issued
- A vessel was observed by alert HSOs leaking diesel out of a side vent. The vessel attempted to evade Harbor Department boats and did not stop when asked to do so. Information on the vessel was provided to the OCSD HP, who stated they would investigate the vessel and report to the NRC. We provided video evidence of the vessel discharging a red liquid through a vent on the side of the vessel

Safe

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

Highlights included:

- Youth climbing on the seawall at Basin Marine, clearly marked with “Private Property – No Trespassing” signage, were educated and corrected
- The Harbormaster spoke with a captain from City Cruises on arrangements for junior programs and harbor racing activities. The Captain was educated about permit conditions and methods of communication
- A raft up in the east anchorage was unattended past sunset. When we contacted the responsible party by phone, he indicated they would be back shortly. A number of unattended boats at anchor were addressed throughout the month. It is a requirement to have someone aboard after sunset
- A disabled and abandoned electric vessel was removed/recovered from the swim line at Marina Park
- After-hours evening patrols yielded several dozen navigation light violations
- Numerous paddleboarders without PFDs were educated
- Young kids bow riding with no life jackets were contacted and corrected. They appreciated the contact
- Two adults on personal watercrafts were observed speeding and were educated. Several other instances of speeding in the harbor were also addressed
- A paddleboarder in distress was assisted back to the safety of the beach at 15th Street. Clearly exhausted, the paddleboarder was very grateful to be rescued
- Another HSO rescued two kayakers who were in distress
- A disabled electric vessel was towed to safety at the 19th Street public dock
- A “Lunch and Learn” was conducted with the TowBoatUS crew. We reviewed towing arrangements, severe weather patrols, and safety equipment
- Bridge jumpers at the Lido Isle bridge were deterred while there was no lifeguard on duty. New legislation to prevent climbing on public structures and allow for more support from the NBPD was introduced
- HSOs assisted a vessel full of youth, swimming and paddling their Harbor 20 back into the harbor entrance with a short tow
- The voyage of a rental electric vessel was terminated due to non-operational navigation lights
- Several instances of speeding involving private vessels, rental vessels, and foil boards were addressed and corrected
- Youths jumping off the #5 navigation marker near the M Street public dock were educated and corrected
- An electric vessel constituting a fire hazard due to a multiple berthing situation was identified and addressed
- HSOs made contact with and firmly educated an adult who jumped out of a moving electric vessel amidst heavy traffic
- We received a radio call from a passerby reporting a medical emergency at the Coral Street public dock. We responded and found just a sleepy sunbather who was verified to be okay

- An electric vessel cruising during evening hours was observed on the inside of the swim area at Marina Park. The operator was educated and removed from the swim area.
- Several instances of improper anchoring were addressed and corrected
- A mid-sized sportfishing vessel was observed by HSOs running over a mooring spreader line in the D field. HSOs assisted the vessel and flagged down a diver who freed the vessel. The spreader line appeared not to be damaged and was identifiable by the required floats
- HSOs rendered First Aid to a fisherman on a public dock
- A tender to a visiting large vessel was observed in violation of navigation light requirements. The situation was addressed with the operator, but not without verbal insults, rudeness, and insolence to the HSO
- Several other instances of navigation light violations were observed during after-hours patrols. In all cases, education was provided, and compliance was achieved
- An electric vessel ran over and got wrapped up on a spreader line in the J field. HSOs called to assist were able to free the vessel and tow it to safety at the 19th Street public dock

Well-enjoyed

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

- A 12' tender belonging to a large vessel well-known to the Harbor Department was left on a public dock in an area restricted to vessels of 9' or less and received an NOV. The vessel that is well known to the department consumed significant resources and has been asked to take a break from the harbor while they attempt to improve the reputation of the vessel
- Discretion was exercised by HSOs with a 33' motor vessel berthed at the Central Ave. public dock. That public dock is limited to boats under 30'. We granted permission for the boat to stay at that dock until low tide, when it was safe to transit under the Newport Blvd. bridge
- An investigation was conducted on a paddleboard rental concession operating out of a box truck at the Lido Bridge
- Two different vessels made use of the day-use mooring program
- But for a punch list of items, the public dock replacement project was completed
- HSOs observed vandalism taking place on the Coral public dock. The follow-up investigation resulted in a citation
- Initiated by a complaint from a nearby resident, the berthing arrangement for an electric vessel was investigated to see if it was over a property line in the Balboa Coves area. It was determined that the berthing arrangement was in compliance with the applicable regulations
- We continue to receive consistently excellent results from the anonymous online survey we make available to visitors at the marina at Marina Park and users of mooring sub-permits

- Several investigations focused on potential unpermitted charters were carried out. Unpermitted charters are a constant challenge as new vessels are observed in the harbor every week
- Someone on board a vessel associated with a raft-up in the west anchorage swam over to the vessel in the Large Vessel Anchorage and attempted to board the large vessel without permission (trespassing). A person responsible for the large vessel asked us to have a talk with the individual who trespassed. After denying what was clearly provided to us in video footage, a written warning was issued, and the threat of revocation of the raft-up permit was mentioned to the person responsible
- Keen observation by a Dockmaster monitoring conditions at 19th Street public dock indicated a charter (likely unpermitted) was picking up passengers. After departing the 19th public dock, the vessel was observed holding fast in the H mooring field. HSOs with a Code Enforcement Officer aboard were called to intercept the suspected unpermitted charter vessel
- HSOs approached a vessel in the west anchorage to acknowledge and reward the mariners for ensuring the kids aboard were wearing PFDs and enjoying the harbor safely. The kids were rewarded with lollipops. Their grandfather (who we did not know was on board), a noted and important figure in the harbor, was VERY appreciative

Odds and Ends

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

- We conducted a couple of very productive and beneficial conversations with the Avalon Harbormaster about operations and organizations. We shared with him our training program for new hires. There is a lot of overlap in our operations and some differences as well (public dock maintenance and repair, number of moorings, focus on visitor serving/transient, large vessels, waterfront residences). We expect further collaboration and best practice sharing
- We had a visit from the factory representative and engineer from Vita Power, who gave our electric vessel the "once over" and reported the vessel is in very good shape
- The Harbormaster participated in a harbor tour with the Visit Newport Beach staff. Much information sharing took place. They report that a group travel planner is 65% more likely to book an event in Newport Beach if the planner has an experience on the harbor during a scouting visit
- Considerable resources were spent responding to and educating a waterfront resident about the sub-permit program and what is allowed by sub-permittees, including living aboard
- We had our first occurrence of adhesive time zone markings being removed by mariners wishing to stay longer than the markings allowed. Someone thought removing the 20-minute time zone markings would allow them more time at the 15th Street public dock

- Observant HSOs issued a Stop Work order at a waterfront residence on Balboa Island that had no construction permit
 - We made contact with the new Commanding Officer of the USCG “Narwhal” and agreed to plan some additional training exercises in the near future
 - Based on public comments at a recent Harbor Commission meeting, previous work done studying public docks in Newport Harbor was reviewed. Those studies were from 2013 and 2018
 - A review of documents processed by the department in the last three years revealed the following:
 - Mooring Sub-Permit Agreements (1600+ per year)
 - Marina Park Slip Agreements (1200+ per year)
 - Mooring Permit Transfer Applications (currently in process for conversion to EnerGov ~ 100 per year)
 - Live Aboard Permit (New Issues and Renewals ~ 55 per year)
 - Mooring License Agreements (~ 15 per year)
 - Dinghy Rack Rental Agreements (Marina Park and Balboa Yacht Basin ~ 15 per year)
 - Balboa Yacht Basin Slip Agreements (currently managed by third-party property manager ~ 50 per year)
 - Balboa Yacht Basin Garage Rental Agreements (currently managed by third-party property manager ~ 5 per year)
 - As of this report, there were 20 sub-permits written for onshore moorings. 17 of those sub-permits have enjoyed successive renewals. Of the 17 sub-permittees enjoying successive renewals, seven of them have enjoyed successive renewals dating back further than the beginning of this summer. Their original sub-permit dates are:
 - 8/30/2023 representing 48 subsequent renewals
 - 6/28/2023 representing 52 subsequent renewals
 - 3/19/2022 representing 83 subsequent renewals
 - 8/5/2021 representing 98 subsequent renewals
 - 6/12/2023 representing 83 subsequent renewals
 - 9/7/2021 representing 96 subsequent renewals
 - 12/1/2023 representing 42 subsequent renewals
 - As of this report, there were 14 sub-permits written for offshore moorings. Six of those sub-permits are enjoying successive renewals. Of those six enjoying successive renewals, two sub-permittees are living aboard. Of the two sub-permittees living aboard who are enjoying successive renewals,
 - One began sub-permitting with us on 7/15/2025 meaning he has renewed twice
 - The other began sub-permitting with us on 8/2/2025, meaning he has not yet renewed with us, but plans to
- We completed more than 100 calls for service (Quests) on Saturday, August 30. Our hours of operation that day were 0700 to 2230

The most amusing call of the month came from an angry constituent demanding to know why our response to his report of a diesel spill wasn't more swift and robust. After a couple of brief questions about how the caller made his report and who he talked to, it

was determined that his report was made to another agency, not the City Harbor Department. It was then suggested that he reach out to an elected official who represents that other agency.

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
Attachment B – Harbor Department Statistics by Month, Current Year
Attachment C – Harbor Department Statistics, Year over Year Comparison
Attachment D – Harbor Department Definitions