



NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

May 13, 2026
Agenda Item No. 7.4

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

FROM: Paul Blank, Harbormaster
pblank@newportbeachca.gov
(949) 270-8159

TITLE: Harbormaster Update – April 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 April 2026. The summary of activities is organized around the department's mission to keep 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, demonstrating continued vigilance in protecting harbor water quality and a healthy marine environment.

- We assisted the Balboa Bay Club Dockmaster with a hydraulic oil spill, which was contained with 1000' of absorbent boom
- Sanding dust discharged into the water at a local boat yard was reported to us and quickly followed up on by an HSO and a CEO. A citation for discharge was issued
- An aluminum boat with motor and gas tank was dewatered for a second time in as many days. The boat has no CF numbers and was subsequently impounded and removed from the harbor
- We conducted several after-hours patrols with a heavy focus on suspected unpermitted live-boards
- A mooring permittee's assigned vessel was observed discharging diesel from its vents while transiting the harbor. OCSD was notified and responded. We boomed the vessel off when it was brought back to its mooring. OSCD made all of the necessary notifications to CAL OES & USCG
- One mooring permittee called to complain about excessive bird droppings on another nearby mooring. Code Enforcement followed up with the offending and offensive vessel
- We conducted a complex impound and eviction of a trespasser living aboard a permittee's assigned vessel without permission. The vessel was relocated while the vessel title and proper assignment to the mooring were sorted out
- A permitted live-aboard complained about a nearby unpermitted live-aboard. An investigation and further documentation were carried out
- An electric vessel in a private, residential slip in danger of sinking was addressed. We dewatered the vessel several times while trying to make contact with the registered owner
- The dredging activity between Marina Park and the 19th Street Public Dock concluded. All the material bound for the Port of Long Beach, rather than the EPA LA-3 dump site, has been delivered
- We removed several instances of "Mooring for Sale" signs on 15th Street Beach and from around Balboa Island. We made contact with the responsible party and educated him about sign requirements in the City and restrictions on posting such things on public beaches
- A dilapidated vessel full of debris was abandoned and subsequently impounded from the Balboa Marina Public Dock. Registration information on the vessel was considerably out of date
- The trash rover successfully completed an autonomous transit from Marina Park up the Rhine Channel and back. This marks significant progress in getting the rover to operate autonomously

Safe

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

- Access to the water from the beach at Marina Park was curtailed due to nearby dredging activities. Recreation programs, including paddleboard launching, were relocated to the marina. We were unable to accommodate three vessels with slip reservations in the marina due to the dredger blocking access
- Several swimmers made their way into the water at Marina Park despite clear signage and caution tape at the water's edge identifying the proximal dredging activities as the reason for the closure. HSOs kindly advised swimmers of the closed access and the presence of the potentially very dangerous dredging equipment
- A rental vessel disabled in the ferry channel was assisted to a nearby public dock by an HSO. The HSO performed an inspection of safety equipment on board and found it to be deficient, as well as the education, instructions, and resources provided by the rental company operator. This rental concession recently changed ownership. A code case has been initiated, and talks are ongoing with the new owner/operator of the concession
- Our regular mooring check patrols were extended to focus on proper mooring setup, including line size, use of thimbles and shackles with seizing wire. This focus resulted from a permittee's expressed concerns. Several notifications were sent to permittees with deficient setups
- We worked with CERT team volunteers to add more signs and caution tape to mark the closure of access to the water from the beach at Marina Park
- We provided a tow for a disabled electric vessel from Mariners Mile to its berth on Lido Peninsula. The commercial tow service provider was unavailable due to an emergency, and asked us to pitch in
- The 19th Street Public Dock was closed briefly to accommodate dredging
- Several members of the Harbor Department participated in a Mass Casualty Incident Drill at Marina Park, coordinated by the Newport Beach Police Department. Members of the Nbfd, NBLG, Hbfd, and CERT also participated. All agreed it was a great experience
- A visiting vessel with a wrapped propeller was towed safely into the West Anchorage so the captain could conduct repairs and restoration of propulsion
- A very well-attended Newport Beach International Boat Show was conducted with no significant incidents
- A Stop Work Order was posted at a property on Linda Isle for major construction that was not permitted
- HSOs provided traffic control around a dive operation repairing a water main between the mainland and Little Balboa Island that took several days, including the days leading up to the Newport to Ensenada Yacht Race, which generated significant traffic
- A visiting sailboat inbound to Marina Park with a solo, elderly operator was assisted safely to the intended destination. The vessel had an inoperable auto helm with its main sail hoisted and stuck, requiring assistance. HSOs and CEOs responded

to the east anchorage where the vessel was standing by. HSOs and CEOs assisted the operator in securing the main sail and readying the sailboat for docking procedures

- HSOs stood by while a sailing vessel with transmission problems anchored off Collins and waited for a commercial tow service provider to help them

Well-enjoyed

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

- We conducted a couple of meetings and a tour for a software vendor, which may improve the way we conduct enforcement of time limits on the public docks
- We provided a tow for a disabled electric vessel from the east anchorage to its nearby home berth
- Our colleagues in the Recreation and Senior Services expressed concern and frustration with a frequent user of the Human Lift who was misusing the long dock at Marina Park. There was no permit or authorization for the vessel operator to use the long dock, which is not a public dock. The vessel operator allowed his passengers to leave an electric wheelchair on the long dock, blocking access to a dock box and the fire extinguisher box. The vessel owner received another strongly worded letter outlining City expectations, citing policy, courtesy, and common sense
- A small vessel auction was conducted, allowing us to clear out our impound yard and send various craft off to new, happy owners. The auction netted \$1,407
- A check on compliance with signage codes was conducted. The moorings with signage of concern were found to be compliant. The limit is 216 square inches
- HSOs coordinated communication and safe navigation between the dredge and NHYC Baldwin and Palmer Cup events several times
- The marina at Marina Park was filled with participants in the Newport to Ensenada Race. Upon their departure, the marina was immediately refilled for a long weekend by a visiting yacht club group
- A vessel anchored in the east anchorage was educated and corrected, despite the removal of boundary buoys and Local Notice to Mariners. Several instances of vessels anchored in the removed east anchorage were addressed. Vessels were advised to enjoy the west anchorage
- In a fantastic example of collaboration and clever solution development, a new rental vessel concession was permitted at a facility with limited parking. The Zoning Code doesn't consider ride sharing when establishing parking standards. In this case, the City allowed the applicant to offer discounts to clients who use ride-sharing services or a parking structure across the Harbor. The parking solution appears to work for the applicant, the Harbor, and the residents of Balboa Island

Odds and Ends

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

- We removed signage advertising a mooring for sale. Advertising a mooring for sale is permitted. Placing advertising signs on a public beach is not permitted
- There were several really nice articles in the April 9 edition of “The Log” all about Newport Harbor. The first sentence in one of the articles reads, "Newport Harbor is widely regarded as one of Newport Beach’s defining features, and for both residents and visiting boaters, it stands out as one of the most well-managed recreational harbors in the country."
- We improved our use of a drone for Public Dock Enforcement and anchorage checks. This improved use of technology is still in “test” mode, but we are making progress. When fully implemented, this should improve the efficiency with which we carry out two of our more labor-intensive, usual tasks
- An analysis of mooring length adjustment applications since 2021 was carried out. The table appears in the attached statistics infographic
- We received a very nice note and comments from a constituent on improved water quality around Newport Island. The writer and City officials believe the improved water quality and water clarity are a result of dredging
- The electric patrol vessel had some upgrades and improvements completed, which improved the tracking and maneuverability at the slow speeds we typically operate. In addition, we’ve asked the manufacturer to consider programming a softer transition into gear. The torque with which it engages is more than the outdrive was designed for
- It looks likely the Harbor Department will take over management of the marina and garages at Balboa Yacht Basin on July 1 for sure, and June 1 if we can get the office operational in time. This transition to City management represents significant cost savings in the operation of the marina and an anticipated improvement in service delivery to the tenants
- A harbor stakeholder meeting related to recommendations from the State Lands Commission has been set for May 27 at the OASIS Senior Center. Members of the SLC staff will attend
- The recording of the May Harbor Commission meeting will be posted along with agendas and minutes going forward

The most amusing email of the month came from a mooring permittee who was not pleased that his vacant mooring was being used and demanded that we stop using it. The mooring had no vessel assignment and no recent occupancy or assignment. We explained that more than 80 vessels had to be relocated to accommodate the current dredging project. We also called attention to the mooring permit language authorizing the

Harbor Department to make use of vacant moorings. We provided a snip of the permit, which the permittee had recently signed.

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