



NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

June 10, 2026
Agenda Item No. 6.4

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

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TITLE: Harbormaster Update – May 2026 Activities

ABSTRACT:

This report summarizes Harbor Department activities for May 2026, organized around the department's mission to keep Newport Harbor clean, safe, and well-enjoyed. Key highlights include continued trash rover operations with CERT volunteer support, enforcement actions addressing illegal charter operations and unpermitted commercial activity, and multiple vessel assists, including a side-tow of a vessel experiencing steering failure. The department issued Notices of Violation for noise violations and unauthorized public dock use by commercial charter operators and filed a Criminal Complaint — resulting in a bench warrant — against a repeat illegal charter operator. The Harbor Department assumed early management responsibility for the Balboa Yacht Basin on June 1, 2026, generating approximately \$35,000 in immediate savings and projecting more than \$175,000 in annual operational savings in the future. Public contacts reached 168 in May, the highest monthly total recorded in 2026 to date.

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 May 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 saw anecdotal evidence of clean, healthy waters in the harbor. An angler caught a six-pound sand bass caught at Park Ave Public Dock
- Operation of the trash rover continued with CERT volunteers assisted by HSOs. We're still experiencing some issues with the fully autonomous operation of the rover. We greatly appreciate the CERT volunteers' efforts to operate the rover with its remote controller
- An alert HSO observed discharge into Promontory Bay. The source was tracked to a storm drain likely discharging from an upland construction site across the street. Landside Code Enforcement was contacted to continue the investigation
- The "Good Sea Maritan" trash collecting vessel brought in a sinking vessel from Lower Castaways. HSOs disposed of the vessel
- We placed a significant emphasis on fishing enforcement, focusing on locations, methods, allowed equipment, and techniques. Our efforts were mostly conducted with education and met with compliance

Safe

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

- Dive operation contractors working in the Santa Ana River were assisted with moorings and access to the Long Dock at Marina Park in support of their efforts to repair an outfall pipe
- An illegal charter advertised and scheduled for Mother's Day was found and terminated with a citation
- We collaborated with a local radio expert to troubleshoot interference on the VHF radio onboard our electric patrol vessel. Substandard wiring seemed to be the culprit
- A swimmer in the crowded channel along Balboa Island North Bayfront was educated and complied
- Speeding wave runners slowed when alerted by an HSO with the use of the siren onboard his patrol vessel. Some have questions whether the Harbor Safety Officers should have lights and sirens on their patrol boats. This is an excellent example of why that equipment is important in carrying out our mission and how it is used effectively and with discretion by the dedicated and capable HSOs
- Carried out several mooring assists for local permittees and visiting boaters
- Installed a swim ladder at the Central Avenue Public Dock based on a suggestion from Commissioner Marston
- We assisted with a vessel that lost power to the Balboa Marina Public Dock where the operator could affect repairs and call for additional help

- A vessel experienced steering failure after leaving one of the shipyards. Alert and capable HSOs side-towed the vessel back to its dock. The vessel was in danger of drifting into moored vessels and Lido Isle docks. A commercial tow service was unavailable to assist at the time of distress
- We loaned an anchor to a 60' vessel in the west anchorage, which encountered spacing issues with an unpermitted raft-up ("Floatchella"). As the event kept building, the vessel was unable to retrieve its bow anchor, and its bow was in danger of touching the boat in front of it. The anchor we lent him, deployed from his stern, allowed him to avoid contact with the raft-up. The vessel owner was thankful
- A vessel collision was observed in the West Anchorage. When the vessel proceeded ("hit and run"), HSOs engaged the US Coast Guard and OCSD Harbor Patrol. The offending vessel's voyage was terminated by the Coast Guard
- One of the tug captains associated with the current dredging operations expressed concerns about a moored vessel outside the designated boundaries of the A Field. The situation was addressed with the permittee as the mooring was impeding the safe navigation of the tug and scow.

Well-enjoyed

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

- The annual permitted Lilly Call Fishing Tournament took place with more participation than in recent years. Anglers reported excellent results
- A significant effort and some new tools were deployed to monitor noise and other aspects of the Drenched Yoga experience on the WaterCrest. HSOs remained on duty after hours on Saturday, May 16, to ensure compliance with noise limits and other conditions of their operations. With a few exceptions on the final day of the experience, all observations were that the event remained within the conditions of their permits and participants had a clean, safe and enjoyable experience
- A stalled rental vessel was assisted by skilled HSOs who were able to get their means of propulsion reactivated. The HSOs sent the pleased customers on their way, and they were able to complete their voyage
- We observed a commercial charter operation using a public dock for passenger pick up. A Notice of Violation was issued which seems to have curtailed that activity
- An NOV was issued to another, large commercial charter operation for noise above the allowed limit
- Without a permit or notification to the Dockmaster at Marina Park, an organized wedding with a vessel med-tied to the long dock took place on a busy Saturday afternoon. The Dockmaster thoughtfully allowed them to stay until the vows were exchanged and then sent the entire party on their way
- Observant HSOs found an unaccompanied dog swimming in the harbor. The very tired dog was brought onboard a patrol boat and taken to the Harbor Department office, where his caregivers were contacted. It seems the dog escaped from an upland short-term rental and decided to enjoy a little unsupervised swimming. Both the caregiver and dog were very happy when reunited

- An unpermitted organized fitness class taking place in Carnation Cove was addressed

Odds and Ends

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

- We have long pursued a vessel owner who continues to offer his vessel for charter in Newport Harbor without a Marina Activities Permit. We have issued a Notice of Violation and several citations with financial penalties. The operator ignored all of that and continues to advertise his vessel for charter in Newport. With the help of the City Attorney's office, we filed a Criminal Complaint against the vessel owner. The arraignment for the vessel owner took place in May. The vessel owner failed to show up for that arraignment. There is now a bench warrant out for the arrest of the vessel owner. We're not going to send a Marshal out to track this guy down, but if he gets pulled over for a traffic violation or gets stopped by any other member of Law Enforcement in Orange County for any reason, the warrant will come up, and he will be taken into custody
- Under the heading of "Imitation is the most sincere form of flattery", we are pleased to report that the City of Huntington Beach Mayor has paraphrased the Harbor Department's mission in describing recent efforts they have made, including working with Clean Earth Rovers to improve water quality and the cleanliness of their beaches. Several social media posts quote the Mayor as saying, "We are proud of the ongoing efforts by our City staff, environmental partners, and residents who work together to help keep our coastline clean, safe, and enjoyable for everyone."
- A picture of the Harbor Department truck all dressed up for the Balboa Island Parade was shared with some alumni team members. Without prompt, both remarked, "nice new tires!" indicating that the presence of the new tires was of greater interest (and value) than the heavy decorations
- We are actively engaged in a recruitment effort to add one full-time and three part-time team members to support our new responsibilities at the Balboa Yacht Basin. We took over responsibility for management of the slips and garages on June 1. We hope to have our new team members on board shortly after July 1. By taking over from the property management company a month early, we saved the City about \$35K in unbudgeted professional service fees. Going forward, we anticipate saving more than \$175K annually on costs to operate the marina while delivering a better experience for the tenants

There were an extraordinary number of calls, emails, and in-person interactions in May. The Public Contact statistics confirm this. However, none of them rose to the level of reporting as “most amusing interaction of the month.” We’ll try again in June.

Public Contacts Reported by Month – 2026

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
56	75	97	116	168

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