



NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

March 11, 2026
Agenda Item No. 6.7

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

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TITLE: Harbormaster Update – February 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 February 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, demonstrating continued vigilance in protecting harbor water quality and aesthetics.

- A rental vessel customer was observed discharging human excreta into the harbor. The rental concession was subsequently contacted with the specifics of the vessel and time of violation. A citation was issued to the customer
- A significant amount of debris was removed from the harbor including a four-foot-long log which constituted a hazard to navigation (clean and safe!)
- Dockmasters and HSOs responded quickly and contained a diesel leak in the marina at Marina Pak
- HSOs operated the trash-collecting rover as part of debris collection efforts and gave the device needed cleaning and maintenance
- A sea lion was encouraged to vacate a moored vessel in the H field. It is an unusual time of year to be observing sea lions hauled out in the harbor and an unusual location for them to haul out. Sea lions are now a year-round challenge in all areas of the harbor
- HSOs spent significant effort dewatering vessels throughout the harbor but particularly at the public docks as a result of significant rainfall in the month (43 vessels for the month)
- A review of our track tracking statistics indicates that HSOs removed 3,405 pounds of debris from the harbor year-to-date, while our “Good Samaritan” partner removed 7,297 pounds of debris. Comparisons to prior calendar years can be found in Attachment A
- Additional suspected unpermitted live-aboards were investigated both during and outside the Harbor Department's normal hours of operation
- A call to our colleagues in the Police Department received a swift response when it was reported that two motorcycles were illegally parked and blocking access to the Harbor Department Spill Response Trailer
- A mooring permittee and owner of the assigned vessel received a Notice of Violation for unsanitary conditions aboard the vessel
- The Harbormaster was observed building skills as an unmanned aerial vehicle pilot. The purpose of building these skills is to quickly trace observed signs of discharge to their source
- A vessel at a private slip was observed sitting low in the water and was reported to the registered owner after a bit of research. The registered owner was very grateful for our observations and quick reporting

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.

- HSOs performed a significant number of mooring assists during the month, especially related to the severe weather. HSOs advise that there is a good case to be made for the use of spreader or sand lines to improve the safety of mooring maneuvers in adverse weather conditions
- HSOs untangled mooring tackle for several permittees and sub-permittees
- Struggling and stranded paddleboarders were assisted from 12th Street back to their point of embarkation at Marina Park
- HSOs assisted a commercial tow provider with safely mooring a sunken vessel they had in tow onto a Marina Park mooring while the disposition of the vessel was determined
- Unpermitted construction on a residential dock was observed and stopped
- A vessel broke free of its mooring in the C field and was subsequently relocated to a Marina Park mooring when it was determined the vessel was inoperable. It is precisely to avoid circumstances like this that vessel operability requirements exist for assigned vessels on moorings. The vessel owner received a NOV
- A sailboat from the City recreation program was observed in the ocean. After HSOs checked with recreation program leadership, the vessel operators were advised to sail the vessel directly back into the harbor and they complied
- HSOs assisted with a request on a broken mooring in the Grand Canal
- Several small tenders and kayaks were better secured to their associated moored boats
- Another vessel assigned to a mooring in the A field broke loose and was resecured
- During the Harbor Department's annual "All Hands" meeting, an excellent set of tabletop exercises was conducted. The exercises involved devising appropriate responses to five emergency scenarios when an HSO was the first responder on scene
- Two double-berthing violations were observed during after-hours patrols and resulted in NOVs
- HSOs observed a dinghy experiencing engine failure and then safely escorted it to the nearest Public Dock
- HSOs installed protective cages around several of the solar lights on various Private Aids to Navigation throughout the harbor in an attempt to better protect them from damage
- Barge and tug traffic control was provided several times and included stopping and re-routing participants in a collegiate rowing regatta

Well-enjoyed

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

- A small vessel found adrift near the Washington Street public dock was collected, identified, and returned to its owner
- An offshore mooring permittee with a new vessel brought it to his mooring without informing the Harbor Department. As part of the usual activity of "mooring Checks", the unauthorized use of the mooring was identified.

Subsequent communication with the permittee revealed that the vessel was his. The permittee was advised of the requirements for proof of registration, proof of insurance, and a vessel inspection before the vessel could be assigned to and occupy the mooring. The permittee quickly complied with all the requirements and was grateful for our diligence in this regard

- The project to refinish the public dock finials remains in progress
- A mooring permittee in the J field claimed to be unaware of the vessel length restrictions at the Central Avenue public dock, although they are clearly marked on the dock and signage at the top of the gangway. HSOs politely provided education regarding the applicable regulations, and the permittee embarked to another point of access to upland amenities appropriate for his vessel

Odds and Ends

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

- Two City moorings in the C field were converted to helical anchor systems with dynamic tackle and made sand line style moorings. These moorings are part of the mooring license program. The sand lines style requires only one float on the west end of the mooring, so fairways are less cluttered. HSOs have observed and reported good things about the new arrangement for these moorings, and they performed well during the recent episodes of severe weather
- A representative of the Harbor Department attended a recent meeting of the US Coast Guard Auxiliary post in Newport. We are in discussions with them on collaborative endeavors
- Several disparaging remarks have been made about the functionality and usability of the Balboa Marina Public Dock in recent public meetings. Those remarking about the public dock are likely not familiar with the 2013 Harbor Commission Study of public docks that resulted in several recommendations about how the existing public docks could be better maintained and utilized. That study also identified five locations at which additional public docks would best serve mariners in Newport Harbor. The new public docks at Central Avenue and Balboa Marina were identified in that 2013 study as locations adjacent to amenities mariners most want to access when they come ashore in Newport Harbor
- The most amusing call of the month came from a waterfront resident who is also an offshore mooring permittee. The offshore mooring has been vacant for several months and was used to accommodate one of the vessels temporarily displaced by current dredging activities. The permittee was not pleased about the mooring being used for this purpose. The permittee was advised of the opportunity to assign a vessel to the mooring and then occupy it, which they subsequently did. The assigned vessel they selected is a kayak, which now occupies the mooring.

Another vacant mooring was found to accommodate the vessel displaced by the dredging. During one of the several severe weather incidents in February, the permittee noticed the kayak had come loose from one end of the mooring. The permittee called to ask us to collect it and secure it to their private, residential dock. We explained we would secure it properly to the mooring, but could not bring it to their dock.

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