

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

October 8, 2014

Admiral Paul F. Zukunft  
Commandant  
U.S. Coast Guard  
2100 2nd St SW STOP 7000  
Washington Dc 20593-7000

Dear Admiral Zukunft:

We write to convey our strong opposition to the United States Coast Guard's (USCG) decision to close the Air Facility in Newport, Oregon, effective December 2014. Closing this facility would threaten the safety of mariners who make their living in the waters around Newport and we urge you to reverse this decision.

Marine activity is synonymous with life in and around the city of Newport, and it has continued to grow since the USCG established daily air presence there. Newport is home to one of Oregon's three deep draft ports, the state's largest commercial fishing fleet, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Pacific fleet, the Oregon State University research vessels, in addition to a robust recreational and sport fishing industry. The Port of Newport recently completed a multi-million dollar rebuilding of its international terminal, which is expected to increase international shipping traffic. Newport fishermen landed over 80 million pounds of fish in 2012, a three-fold increase from the 1992 haul, and Newport saw a fifteen-fold increase in the number of sports fishing trips for Albacore tuna between 2001 and 2012. The USCG rightly recognized the importance of having search and rescue assets so close to such a hub of marine activity in 1987—which is why the decision to reduce those same services with today's even larger hub is troubling. Clearly now is not the time to be cutting search and rescue services.

We also have concerns about the USCG process for making and announcing this decision. The USCG told some of our offices in April 2014 that this facility would remain open through 2015. A unilateral decision to close the facility in December would be an obvious departure from that previous commitment, and we are frustrated that our offices were not consulted at any stage during the process. More concerning still is that this recent decision seems to have been made without consulting the fleet, the community, or any local stakeholders. Since the USCG has designated Newport a "Coast Guard City"—a program to highlight the "need for understanding between the Coast Guard and the local community"—we are frankly surprised at what appears to be a total lack of consultation regarding this decision.

We join the Oregon Coast community in expressing our admiration and support for the USCG and its mission. We also believe strongly that removing search and rescue assets from Newport would only heighten the chance of a very preventable tragedy. In the spirit of the USCG's long partnership with Newport and Oregon's coastal communities, we urge you to reconsider this decision.

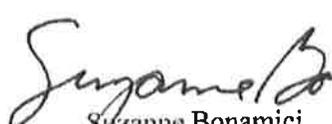
Sincerely,

  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

  
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

  
Kurt Schrader  
Member of Congress

  
Peter DeFazio  
Member of Congress

  
Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress

  
Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



## Residents in Newport fear air facility closure

Closure is right at crab season

OCTOBER 21, 2014 10:47 AM • BY KURTIS HAIR, THE WORLD

NEWPORT — Newport residents made it clear to the U.S. Coast Guard that the decision to close its air facility would have deadly consequences.

Hundreds gathered at Oregon Coast Community College on Monday evening for a community meeting to discuss and hear public comment on the Coast Guard's recent decision.

On Nov. 30, the Coast Guard will close its air facility in Newport and consolidate all of its aviation resources on the Oregon coast to Astoria and North Bend. Newport is one of the busiest ports on the Oregon coast, and it would take about an hour for the closest sector, North Bend, to respond to an emergency.

The city of Newport and Lincoln County held the meeting to get the Coast Guard's and the public's input over the issue.

It was an emotional night.

The meeting started off with Admiral R.T. Gromlich, commander for the 13th U.S. Coast Guard District, explaining why the facility had to close.

"The decision to close the air facility in Newport, Ore., as well as Charleston, S.C., was actually part as a budget submission for fiscal year '14," Gromlich said.

Gromlich said it has been a tough environment fiscally, and the Coast Guard is constantly having to make difficult decisions, and these decisions come from the highest levels.

Since the decision was announced, many in Newport and surrounding communities banded together. One organization, Newport Fishermen's Wives, a nonprofit organization, started a petition to get the Coast Guard to reverse its decision.

The petition got about 18,000 signatures, and Jennifer Stevens, president of the Newport Fishermen's Wives, gave it, along with hundreds of letters, to the admiral.

Many fishermen, loggers, Newport residents and relatives of those lost in accidents emotionally spoke to members of the Coast Guard and members of the Oregon congressional delegation over the issue.

For Ginni Goblirsch, a Newport resident and former member of the Newport Fishermen's Wives, closing the facility and putting search and rescue an hour away will put lives at risk, she said.

"In this region, and this cold water," Goblirsch said, "an hour is a death sentence. You're not doing search and rescue. You're doing body recovery."

The national requirement for search and rescue is two hours.

On Oct. 11, the Coast Guard rescued five people who were stranded on rocks about 15 miles from Newport. If the air station in Newport had been closed, North Bend might have been too late in responding.

For David Jinks, director of Midwater Trawlers Cooperative and a longtime commercial fisherman, it would have to be an "ideal situation" for the Coast Guard to effectively perform a rescue in an hour.

"Very seldomly in maritime casualties do you ever see the ideal situation," Jinks said. "Most of the time, it's severe weather, heavy weather where your vessel's stressed, your crew is stressed, your captain is stressed. This is when maritime accidents happen."

Many who spoke at the meeting said it's even more disturbing that the Coast Guard would decide to close the air facility a day before crab season starts, which is the most dangerous time of the year to be out at sea.

For Oregon U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, District 5, outpouring from the community at the meeting and the testimony given will hopefully get the Coast Guard to at least delay the closure date and have a chance to find other ways to save money, he said.

"Continue to flood our offices with petitions like this and testimony like this," Schrader said.

Gromlich said he understands these decisions are hard to accept but it's out of his hands.

"I can't do anything about that as far as the closure date or offer to delay the closing in any way," Gromlich said. "I've got to carry that out."

From: **Michael Bateman** <[bateman160@gmail.com](mailto:bateman160@gmail.com)>

Date: Thu, Oct 9, 2014 at 10:32 AM

Subject: FOIA request

To: [efoia@uscg.mil](mailto:efoia@uscg.mil)

Hello -

I would like to make two records requests under the FOIA.

I would like the records of how the decision was made to close the air facility in Newport, Oregon (see attached letter), including any public process that occurred.

Second - I would like a copy of the USCG procedures for closing air facilities.

Thank you very much -

Michael Bateman  
27057 Frodesen Cir NE  
Kingston, WA 98346

**From:** "Trimpert, Michael T CAPT"  
<[Michael.T.Trimpert@uscg.mil](mailto:Michael.T.Trimpert@uscg.mil)>  
**Subject:** RE: USCG Station N. Bend stats  
**Date:** October 13, 2014 9:56:02 AM PDT  
**To:** "[theresawisner@gmail.com](mailto:theresawisner@gmail.com)"  
<[theresawisner@gmail.com](mailto:theresawisner@gmail.com)>

Good Morning Ma'am -

I apologize for the delay; it has been a busy weekend. As you might surmise, there are many ways to count "events" regarding the employment of USCG assets. The number of Search and Rescue (SAR) cases, number of aircraft launches, number of lives saved or assisted, etc. are all examples of different ways statistics can be presented. What I have provided below is the number of SAR cases we opened/managed during a respective fiscal year that involved the USCG Air Facility in Newport, Oregon. We did not necessarily launch the helicopter each time (some events are resolved by Oregon State or local authorities prior to the helicopter taking off) and some of these do indeed turn out to be false alarms or hoaxes (as is the case in FY14 where we had 44 "cases" but 9 turned out to be a false alarm or a hoax (this explains the difference between the 44 we discussed and the 35 discussed by the Lincoln County Dispatch.))

As you can see below, with the exception of FY13 which was a "light" year, we "average" between 40-50 "cases" per fiscal year

(Oct to Oct). If you were to filter the data for "false alarms" and "hoax" events, we would "average" between 30-40 actual "cases" from Newport each year.

FY11: 44  
FY12: 58  
FY13: 27  
FY14: 44

Using the same measurement process and caveats, here is the data for the helicopters that stage out of North Bend, Oregon.

FY11: 78  
FY12: 50  
FY13: 18  
FY14: 56

As we discussed, the Air Facility in Newport over the past 4 years accounted for 46.1% of the aircraft cases versus 53.9% from North Bend.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

CAPT Todd Trimpert  
Sector Commander  
USCG Sector North Bend  
2000 Connecticut Ave  
North Bend, OR 97459  
541-756-9253 (Desk)  
541-991-0007 (Cell)  
541-756-9210 (Command Center)

-----Original Message-----

From: [theresawisner@gmail.com](mailto:theresawisner@gmail.com)  
[mailto:[theresawisner@gmail.com](mailto:theresawisner@gmail.com)]  
Sent: Friday, October 10, 2014 4:27 PM  
To: Trimpert, Michael T CAPT  
Subject: USCG Station N. Bend stats

Captain Trimpert,

Thank you for taking my call, and for your offer to get the specific numbers.

For the Newport Air Facility, I have the following for number of deployments:  
2011: 35

2012: 35

2013: 27

2014: can you give me a number to date, or until Oct 1?

I have a number from our last conversation of 44 deployments between October 1 2013 and September 30 2014. The Lincoln County Dispatch (on-line news) quoted the number at 35 for June 2013 to June 2014. I also have a number from our conversation last Friday of an average of 40 to 50 deployments a year for the Newport facility. Is that number an average from prior years?

You said that North Bend calls are approximately 55% of callouts, and Newport the remaining 45%. Can you give me the number specific to North Bend?

Again, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Theresa Wisner  
541 444 2334