



Coast Guard needs to rethink Newport closure

Our view: The Coast Guard needs to reassure residents that its planned closure of the Newport rescue facility won't cost lives.

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This one definitely gets filed in the category: They can't be serious.

When the Coast Guard recently announced it was closing the air rescue operations in Newport on Dec. 1, we imagine that's what the entire Oregon coast thought.

The announcement was met with the totally understandable outrage up and down the coast. This sounds exactly like the kind of fiscal decision made by bureaucrats looking at balance sheets 3,000 miles away.

Whenever a military installation near a community finds itself on the chopping block you expect to hear residents in nearby communities cry foul. Communities near military bases come to rely on military personnel spending their money. Residents quite naturally become overtly patriotic and come to expect military participation in annual celebrations, especially ones associated with the Armed Forces.

We also understand the continuous budgetary pressures on the military that gave birth to the Base Realignment and Closure efforts that have taken place over the last generation. That's why we have come to accept base consolidations like Joint Base Lewis-McChord near Tacoma, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson near Anchorage and Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

But Oregon coast residents have a more intimate relationship with the Coast Guard – a relationship that means the difference between life and death.

Everyone who plies the coastal waters of the Pacific knows that survival in those chilly waters is dicey, at best. Under even the best survival conditions, a person floating in the water will succumb to hypothermia in 10-20 minutes. Only a quick rescue response offers a chance for survival.

Coast Guard officials promised residents that moving rescue operations to Reedsport and Astoria would still provide adequate response. No one has bought that line, and last week — after a visit from some of Oregon's congressional delegation — the Coast Guard officials in Washington, D.C., said they would delay the closure by two weeks.

We think the agency should delay the closure indefinitely until it can convince reasonable people that their very lives won't be at stake.