

Newport and the Central Oregon Coast
Community Characteristics and Continued Need for a Locally Based
USCG SAR Helicopter

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The U.S. Coast Guard has operated the helicopter air station in Newport, Oregon continuously since 1986. The air station was constructed on property leased from the city. Improvements include fuel tanks and living quarters. The Newport Fire Department provides coverage for takeoffs and landings. The population of the area served by the air facility has grown exponentially since 1986. It is important to note that it is the only Coast Guard air facility on the Oregon coast located out of a tsunami zone.

Newport and the central coast has the largest and most diverse commercial fishing fleet in the State with the highest value of seafood landings. In 2013, Newport ranked 15th in the nation for seafood landings (127 million pounds) and 19th in the nation for landed value. (www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov) It is the homeport of 254 commercial fishing vessels. The highest numbers of commercial vessel licenses in the state were issued to the Newport/Tillamook port groups (ODFW 2003 license data). In 2013, commercial fishing vessels unloaded their catch 4,820 times which translates into many more thousands of days at sea. (ODFW fish ticket data) Hundreds of vessels home ported elsewhere regularly fish off Newport and land their catch at Newport.

Ocean recreational fishing in Oregon ranks second in the nation for number of trips (196,000), and seafood pounds landed (over 2 million pounds). Newport is the major recreational fishing port in the state. Depoe Bay has the highest number of charter boats along the coast. Both Newport and Depoe Bay regularly host school groups for offshore trips. The season is year round, weather permitting. In addition to fishing, they

offer whale watching and bird watching and other trips. Thousands of people go to sea on charter boats out of Newport, Depoe Bay and Tillamook each year. Recreational fishermen are going further offshore (50 miles) in search of halibut and albacore tuna. A major incident involving a number of recreational fishing vessels so far out at sea is sure to occur. We've seen it before when the weather and sea state quickly changes or dense fog sets in.

Newport is also the major hub for marine research and education in Oregon. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Sea Grant, the OSU Hatfield Marine Science Center, NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center and the newly relocated (from Seattle) NOAA homeport for its western fleet all have and/or host visiting research ships. The new Northwest National Marine Renewable Energy Center and Ocean Observing Systems is also located in Newport. All of these entities have researchers and students who both go to sea as well as study the shore and surf zones. Marine research ship activity over the past few years averages about 50 bar crossings per year with 1,100 people on board. (Port of Newport, HMSC)

The central Oregon coast is known for its miles of easily accessible beaches, rocky shoreline, spectacular ocean cliffs, rough seas and impressive storms. The beauty and ease of access attracts residents and visitors alike to go to the shore, walk the beaches, climb the rocks and cliffs and storm watch.

Dangers associated with near shore and beach human interaction is the focus of the State of Oregon's Public Parks and Recreation beach educational messages. "Beware of Sneaker Waves," "Watch Those Logs," "Rip Currents," "Know the Tides," "High Waves Can Reach You," "Beware of High, Steep Cliffs" and "Heads Up" are the topics included in their beach safety tips. Recreational boaters are encouraged to wear PFDs at all times but few actually do. Numbers of ocean users in the area affected by the proposed elimination of the Coast Guard rescue helicopter will only continue to expand along with cold water emergencies.

The Port of Newport's International Terminal is set to begin maritime commerce shipments in 2015. The Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) is in the process of developing a large science camp in Newport called The Coastal Discovery Center. Scheduled to open in 2016, it will be a year-round immersive camp experience for the hands-on study of the Oregon coast ecosystem. They expect to host 5,000 children and families per year in Newport. Oregon State University has announced the development of the Marine Studies Initiative program. This program will add 500 undergraduates to the 49-acre HMSC campus in Newport beginning 2017.

The central Oregon coast is a treacherous place characterized by cold, rough seas, high winds and strong rip currents. Our cold water kills quickly - in well under an hour if the victim is not wearing a survival suit or in a life raft. Many cold water immersion accidents involve the public who do not normally have this equipment when they walk the beaches, climb on rocks, surf, and kayak or go out on boats.

Newport has a long and mutually beneficial relationship with the Coast Guard. It is a Coast Guard City and the Coast Guard is featured and honored in the annual Loyalty Days festivities as well as the Newport Fishermen's Wives Annual Blessing of the Fleet.

Helicopter and life boat crews coordinate and train with local first responders for surf and rocky shore rescues. Commercial fishermen regularly train in Coast Guard/Sea Grant safety and survival classes. Years ago the first Coast Guard approved curriculum for sea safety and survival training classes was developed and offered in Newport by Oregon Sea Grant and the Alaska Marine Safety Association. None of this has diminished the need for a quick response locally stationed Coast Guard search and rescue helicopter. The helicopter is our only fast response backup no matter the situation. Safety has improved for the commercial fleet but not for the public. It is universally recognized that the presence of a locally based Coast Guard search and rescue helicopter is essential to the safety and well-being of the community and our first responders and the community are determined to do whatever necessary, including providing more local support, to ensure the air station at Newport remains open and

operable. Crews of both the air station and lifeboat station are highly respected and their commitment to the safety and well-being of the community is widely appreciated. There is no community in the U.S. which needs and appreciates the local presence of the search and rescue helicopter more than does Newport.

Our desire is to work cooperatively with the Coast Guard to achieve the goal of retaining the helicopter in Newport. If funding is an issue, we can help address (and already have this year) that via our congressional delegation. If Homeland Security priorities are diminishing the ability of the Coast Guard to maintain its SAR Mission at a high level, we will dedicate all our efforts to address that. If the old National Standard is actually an issue, we would like to help formulate an update to the standard which realistically addresses the cold water rescue parameters of time, geography and temperature. Please, just let us know what more we can do to save our helo,