

Newport residents rally to keep Coast Guard copter

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(Photo: Depoe Bay Fire)

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NEWPORT, Ore. (AP) — Newport residents hoping to keep a Coast Guard helicopter station from closing say the weekend rescue of five people stranded on rocks north of the city argues for keeping it open.

The Coast Guard said it's trying to save money by closing the hangar and barracks in Newport to consolidate helicopter rescue operations in North Bend.

The Newport station consists of a hangar and barracks used by four-person crews on a rotation basis.

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Coast Guard to close Newport helicopter facility

On Saturday, the Coast Guard helicopter ferried five people from the rocks at Fogarty Creek State Park, about 15 miles north of Newport. Three others jumped into the ocean and swam to shore.

The incoming tide would have swept the five people off the rocks within 30 minutes, Fire Chief Joshua Williams of nearby Depoe Bay [told KGW-TV](#).

But it would have taken a helicopter an hour to get from North Bend, 95 miles south near Coos Bay, said Ginny Goblirsch of the "Newport Fishermen's Wives" group organized to fight the closure as a threat to the safety of mariners in the area.

"... those five people would have been washed from the rocks by the rising tide, they would be dead," she said.

A Coast Guard spokesman, Lt. Dana Warr, said Monday that "what would have happened is a tough one to assess."

Warr said it would have taken a rescue helicopter about an hour from North Bend. The Coast Guard station at Astoria in northwest Oregon might be a little closer and could have sent a helicopter, he said.

"We would have done everything possible, given our resources," he said.

The group said it has collected 10,000 signatures on a petition to keep the station open.

The effort has won the support of politicians. Members of Oregon's congressional delegation have asked the Coast Guard in a letter to reverse its decision, and the Lincoln County commission has passed a resolution against closing it.

The closure is scheduled Nov. 30.