

January 16, 2015

**FACT SHEET REGARDING ANNOUNCED CLOSURE
OF NEWPORT'S USCG AIR FACILITY**

What is the issue? On October 2, 2014, a letter from U.S. Coast Guard Rear Admiral Richard Gromlich to the City of Newport, Port of Newport, State Representative Gomberg, and others, announced the decision to eliminate the rescue helicopter stationed in Newport, Oregon and to close the Newport Air Facility on November 30, 2014. This decision was announced without any prior notice to the community or its political representatives.¹ Ultimately, this closure reduces the number of USCG helicopters available to respond to emergencies on the Oregon coast, with significantly greater response times in cold water conditions, where every minute counts toward survival.

Congressional Action. In late October, the Congressional delegation announced that they received assurance from the Commandant of the Coast Guard that the November 30 date previously set for the closure of the Newport Air Facility would be extended to December 15.² Through the leadership of the Oregon Congressional delegation, Congress passed legislation, Public Law No. 113-281, which prohibits the closing of the Newport Air Facility through January 1, 2016.³ Oregon's congressional delegation has declared their continued intent to use their best efforts to secure funding to keep the helicopter air facility open in Newport.

Litigation with the U.S. Coast Guard. The Newport Fishermen's Wives, the Port of Newport, the City of Newport, Lincoln County, and the Midwater Trawlers Cooperative (a coastal fishing group) all joined together as plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the United States Coast Guard filed in federal court to challenge the Coast Guard's plan to cease helicopter search and rescue operations at the Newport Air Facility.⁴ The plaintiffs allege violations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Homeland Security Act of 2002, and the Administrative Procedure Act.⁵ The plaintiffs believe that passage of this law (Public Law No. 113-281) means what it says; that this is a temporary halting of the closure decision. Nothing prevents the Coast Guard from implementing the previous decision to close the Newport Air Facility any time after January 1, 2016. The underlying issues and challenges concerning the decision made by the Coast Guard remain, **unless and until** the Coast Guard rescinds its decision or undertakes a new appropriate decision making process. Instead, the Coast Guard believes the enactment of the legislation moots the basis of the plaintiffs' lawsuit. The parties agreed to file separate motions asserting their respective positions by March of 2015 after which a decision will be rendered by Judge McShane.

Why Does Newport Need its USCG Air Facility to remain open? Newport is home to one of Oregon's three deep draft ports, the state's largest grossing commercial fishing fleet (2013)⁶, the NOAA Pacific Marine Operations Center, Oregon State University research personnel and vessels, and a robust recreational and sport fishing industry. In addition, Lincoln County boasts, by far, the largest share of tourist and recreational ocean users of all counties in Oregon annually.⁷ The attraction of our beaches and recreational opportunities all necessitate the need for timely Coast Guard response. Local residents and visitors regularly experience dangerous conditions while partaking in ocean and forest-based employment and recreation. Local first responders train with and depend on the presence of the USCG Air Facility in Newport to support and ensure the safety and success of their crews during rescue operations. Many will not even enter the water in high surf conditions, and all rely on the USCG Air Facility in Newport for backup and assistance. The USCG standard response time of two hours is

¹ Letter from Rear Admiral R.T. Gromlich to the city of Newport, October 2, 2014

² Newport News-Times "Coast Guard agrees to short delay in closure," October 29, 2014

³ The enacted legislation is the Howard Coble Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2014, Public Law No. 113-281, specifically Section 225(b)

⁴ Filed December 15, 2014, Case No. 6-14-cv-1890-MC, US District Court, District of Oregon (Eugene Division)

⁵ Full citations: NEPA, 42 USC §§ 4231 et. seq.; Homeland Security Act, 6 USC §§ 468(e); and APA, 5 USC §§ 701 et. seq.

⁶ Fisheries of the United States report, 2013

⁷ LaFranchi, Chris, Collin Daugherty, and NaturalEquity. Non-consumptive Ocean Recreation in Oregon. 2011.

unacceptable in the cold water conditions found off the Oregon coast, and waiting up to an additional hour for a helicopter to arrive from North Bend means the difference between a rescue and a recovery mission. Lastly, in the event of an earthquake or tsunami, Newport is the only air facility on the Oregon coast located outside of the tsunami inundation zone.⁸

Facility Coverage Information. Today there are eight USCG helicopters stationed on the Oregon coast, five HH-65s in North Bend and three HH-60 Jayhawks in Astoria.⁹ The USCG has stationed a helicopter in Newport since 1987 as part of the USCG Air Facility North Bend.¹⁰ One ready aircraft and four USCG personnel are located in Newport, and rotate between Newport and North Bend every 24 hours. It is important to note that due to maintenance needs, not all helicopters are available for service at any given time.

Sector North Bend's area of responsibility (AOR) encompasses 220 miles of shoreline extending from Pacific City, Oregon, south to the California border, west to 50nm offshore, and east to the I-5 corridor. Group/Air Facility Astoria has an area of responsibility that stretches from the Queets River on the Washington coast south to Cape Kiwanda on the Oregon coast; and the Columbia River east to Longview, Washington.⁶

The Newport Air Facility averages between 40-50 Search and Rescue (SAR) cases per fiscal year. Over the past four years, the Newport Air Facility accounted for slightly under half of all SAR cases responded to by either Newport or North Bend helicopters.¹¹

Budget Information. The USCG Fiscal Year 2015 Congressional Justification includes line item "Air Facilities Charleston, SC and Newport, OR Closure." This line item indicates that these closures would result in a reduction of 27 FTE Military personnel at a value of \$6,022,000.¹² At this time it is unclear whether this line item represents **both** closures or **each** closure. However, according to Coast Guard sources, the Newport closure would trim about \$6 million from Sector North Bend's annual operating budget of \$25.9 million.¹³ This \$6MM figure has yet to be substantiated by the USCG in any official capacity. A breakdown of the savings has yet to be provided by the Coast Guard.

What is the Impact of the Newport Air Facility Closure on the Oregon Coast? This closure does affect the entire coast. The Newport closure would ultimately reduce the number of USCG helicopters available to respond to emergencies on the coast from eight to six aircraft, resulting in significantly increased response times coast wide, in cold water conditions. The elimination of one-quarter of the USCG helicopters on the Oregon coast would decrease the dispatch reliability of the remaining facilities to respond in the ever-changing and inclement coastal weather conditions. Additional information about the impact of the closure on equipment, personnel, SAR operations, and budget has been requested from the USCG, and a response is pending.

What are the National Coast Guard Search and Rescue (SAR) Standards and Requirements?¹⁴

SAR Readiness: Each Coast Guard unit with a SAR readiness responsibility shall have a suitable SAR resource ready to proceed within 30 minutes of notification of a distress in any US waters - warm or cold.

SAR Mission Response: No greater than a two-hour total response time for any one response unit within a Sector or unit's AOR to arrive at any location within the AOR. This time is calculated from time

⁸ Newport's runway elevation is 160 feet. North Bend and Astoria both have runway elevations 15 feet or under.
⁹ http://www.uscg.mil/history/stations/airsta_northbend.asp; http://www.uscg.mil/history/stations/airsta_astoria.asp

¹⁰ City of Newport Resolution No. 3692

¹¹ Captain Todd Trimpert email communication Oct 13, 2014. Average number of Newport SAR cases between FY2011-14 is 43.25. Filtering the data for "false alarms" and "hoax" events would yield an average between 30-40 actual cases from Newport each year. Newport accounted for 46.1% of helicopter SAR cases between FY2011-14, versus 53.9% from North Bend.

¹² http://www.uscg.mil/budget/docs/USCG_FY2015_Congressional_Justification.pdf

¹³ Newport News Times, "Coast Guard asked to delay Newport closure", October 17, 2014

¹⁴ Detailed information about the USCG Search and Rescue program can be found at http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg534/SAR_Program_Info.asp

of notification of the Coast Guard until the time of arrival on scene, including 30 minutes of preparation time (i.e. a total of 90 minutes from underway to on-scene) in any US waters - warm or cold.

How Does the Coast Guard Define Cold Water? The Coast Guard has established 59°F (10°C) as its definition of cold water. A USCG publication states that at temperatures 59°F and below hypothermia seems to progress much faster than in warmer water.¹⁵

The average water temperature off the coast of Newport in December is 52°F. In January it's 49°F. At its warmest, in September, it's 56°F. By the USCG definition, Newport experiences cold water conditions year round.¹⁶

Additionally, the SAR System Performance Benchmark section includes the following note: These benchmarks were established based on a macro analysis of expected survival times of people in the water and based on an excellent standard of response by existing rescue resources under the current SAR system. It is recognized that regional variances (**cold water versus warm**, resource-rich port area versus remote locations) will impact the success rate in specific regions.

¹⁵ USCG Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular no. 7-91 Oregon's congressional delegation has declared their intent to use their best efforts to secure funding to keep the helicopter air facility open in Newport.

¹⁶ NOAA Water Temperature Table of All Coastal Regions