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Abandoned vessels removed from South Beach marina

(NEWPORT, OR) A dozen vessels creating an expensive and unwieldy problem for the Port of Newport's recreational marina will be dispatched over the coming weeks, thanks to a partnership with the Oregon State Marine Board.

It is a widespread problem among ports and marinas. Boats fall into disrepair and, rather than fix them or pay the cost of disposal, owners sell them off cheaply, according to Port Director of Operations Aaron Bretz. New owners leap at the chance to purchase an inexpensive boat but are quickly overwhelmed by maintenance problems. Eventually, the vessel is no longer seaworthy and, rather than remove them at their own cost, owners simply abandon the boats or sign them over to the marina, effectively saying "it's your problem now."

While the Port of Newport (PON) has a requirement that vessels in the marina be seaworthy, evaluating the condition of the boat and seizing vessels when necessary has historically been a challenge. With the adoption of more rigid internal policies regarding moorage in the marina, the port is working to prevent these worst-case scenarios in the future.

The problem at hand, however, was 12 particular problematic cases taking up moorage space in the marina and posing an ongoing threat of sinking or breaking up.

Relief came in the form of the Oregon State Marine Board's Abandoned Vessel Removal Assistance Program (AVRAP), which is supported by a grant from the NOAA Marine Debris Program. Funded for a two-year period, 36 derelict vessels were addressed around Oregon, including the Newport dozen.

"As far as we are concerned, this is a very user-friendly solution," said Bretz. "The Marine Board is taking care of it."

Dorothy Diehl, a policy program coordinator at OSMB, said an increase in the number of abandoned vessels piling up at marinas and ports around the state was noticed around 2010 and continued to climb. Staff members approached NOAA with the program concept in hopes of dealing with the existing problem while creating a better future.

"Part of our agreement with the organizations involved is that we are using the funding to remove the backlog of abandoned vessels with the idea that, going forward, they will implement practices that we hope will prevent more abandoned boats in the future," Diehl explained.

The South Beach marina was eligible to apply for the funds because they had already met OSMB's qualifications to be deemed a "Clean Marina" and were in a good standing with that voluntary program, which promotes the use of environmentally sound practices.



Condor, built in 1950



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Newport's largest abandoned vessel, the first to be removed as part of the OSMB agreement, was the Condor, a 52-foot wooden vessel built in 1950. It was moved from the marina earlier this month by Columbia Marine Salvage (CMS), of The Dalles, which was awarded \$89,700 for all of the Newport work.

As part of the process, each boat is carefully towed out of the South Beach marina upriver, where it is then removed from the water and dismantled. Per its contract, CMS must follow all state, federal and local laws to ensure that all processes are environmentally appropriate and must provide documentation of the proper disposal. Diehl said contractors are encouraged to recycle as much material as they can, although nine of Newport's vessels are fiberglass and the West Coast has no current options for recycling fiberglass.

At the Port of Newport, Bretz and General Manager Paula Miranda continue to pursue options for addressing the issue in the future. The PON is working with the Department of Environmental Quality and the Department of State Lands on a task force focused specifically on derelict vessels. Putting certain red flags in place related to sale transactions and more rigid enforcement of insurance requirements are part of a multi-layered solution.

"We were budgeting more every year to dispose of boats," Bretz noted. "The more people abandon boats, it is going to affect moorage rates in the future. They need to be disposed of, so they don't sink and cause further environmental damage."

Whenever possible, PON also pursues civil action against owners who abandon boats and leave the port with the problem of disposal.

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