

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA WATERFRONT DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 16, 2012
To: Harbor Commissioners
From: Scott Riedman, Waterfront Director
Subject: **Harbor Operations Report**

Mexican Pangas Frequent Area Beaches

In recent months, several Mexican pangas (20'-30', open, outboard-powered fishing boats) have shown up along Southern California beaches, including one near Refugio, several near the Ventura/Santa Barbara County line and one found abandoned and drifting a quarter-mile off Montecito on February 1st. Harbor Patrol patched a hole in that boat, brought it into Santa Barbara Harbor and turned it over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which transported the vessel by trailer to a storage yard in San Juan Capistrano.

Pangas are being used to smuggle drugs, human cargo or both from Mexico to California with increasing frequency, with drop-off points ranging from San Diego County to San Francisco. The high-speed craft are difficult to detect because they typically travel at night, present a low radar profile and land on relatively uninhabited beaches. Last July, 15 Mexican nationals were stranded on Santa Cruz Island, presumably left there by panga smugglers. During the February 1st incident, several life jackets were found on the beach near where the 28-foot vessel was drifting, suggesting as many as 20 people may have inhabited the craft.

If you encounter or spot a panga at sea, keep a safe distance from the boat and call the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF Channel 16. If you spot a panga on the beach, call ICE officials at 1-866-347-2423 or dial 9-1-1. Under no circumstance should you try to take possession of the abandoned craft.

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