

# CITY OF SANTA BARBARA WATERFRONT DEPARTMENT

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** September 16, 2021  
**To:** Harbor Commission  
**From:** Mike Wiltshire, Waterfront Director  
**Subject:** **Review Of Harbor Patrol Activities**

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That Harbor Commission receive and consider a report on Harbor Patrol's role and responsibilities.

### **BACKGROUND**

Though its activities are often described in monthly Harbor Operations Reports, a comprehensive review of Harbor Patrol's role and responsibilities further explains how this unique unit serves our community.

Harbor Patrol's mission is to enforce laws on land and water to facilitate the safe and orderly use of the Waterfront area. Other public safety duties include emergency medical care, boating education, ocean response and rescue, and emergency fire response. As circumstances warrant, Patrol coordinates operations with City Police, Fire, and Lifeguard departments, Cal Fish and Wildlife, County Sheriffs and agencies of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security like the Coast Guard and Office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Patrol's functions reside in the Harbor Operations Division of the Waterfront Department. It executes its mission 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, employing 10 peace officers and a supervisor who holds the rank of lieutenant. Each uniformed patrol officer is a sworn peace officer under Penal Code 830.33 (b) who wears a duty belt with phone, multi-agency radios, collapsible baton, TASER, pepper spray, handcuffs, and sidearm. Each officer also has access to a patrol truck, fire-fighting equipment, vessel dewatering equipment, medical response equipment, oil spill response equipment, and public education materials.

Besides foot and motor patrols, officers patrol local waters in a 24' fiberglass Radon (Patrol Boat #1), a 32' fiberglass Radon (Patrol Boat #2), and a 33' aluminum Norsco (Patrol Boat #3). They also use a 13' rigid-hull inflatable (Patrol Boat #4) for surf rescues, search-and-recovery operations, and special duty operations such as the 2011 tsunami response. Patrol Boats #1, #2, and #3 are designated fire boats, each able to pump up to 950 gallons of water per minute. Officers respond on patrol boats to calls inside the harbor and up to one mile out at sea, and along the coastline from the Andrée Clark Bird Refuge to Arroyo Burro Beach – though they occasionally undertake rescues beyond those

waters when lives are in danger and other rescue resources are unavailable, such as the case with the dive boat *Conception* boat fire off of Santa Cruz Island in 2019.

## **DISCUSSION**

Like all City of Santa Barbara Department's Divisions, Harbor Patrol participates in the City's "P3" performance measurement program that establishes measurable objectives in some areas while simply tracking annual performance in others. Patrol's measurable objectives include the percentage of emergency responses completed in less than five minutes, average training hours per officer per year, and the annual number of public relations events. Tracked measures range from the number of calls for service to the number of enforcement contacts, emergency vessel tows, and bird rescues. Harbor Patrol's P3 annual report for Fiscal Year 2021 is included as an attachment.

### **1. Measurable Objectives**

#### **a. Response Time To In-Harbor Emergencies**

Patrol's response time to in-harbor emergencies is critical to successful outcomes, thus a goal has been set at five minutes or less. Examples of emergency responses include medical calls, sinking boats, vessel accidents, oil spills, drunk driving, drunk boating, burglary, assaults, trespassing, and fires. Fire calls usually result from trash can fires, smoldering cigarettes between deck boards on piers and Stearns Wharf, and dock box fires caused by faulty electrical cords. Periodically, Stearns Wharf has suffered major fires, the two latest in 1998 and 2001. Medical calls, which average 117 per year, are cases such as falls, broken bones, bicycle accidents, choking on food, seizures, heart attacks, strokes, alcohol poisoning, attempted suicides, stingray stings, allergic or diabetic reactions, and more.

Patrol averaged a response time of five minutes or less for at least 98% of calls every year since 2008, having increased its target from 90% to 96% during that time. These rapid responses have saved many lives.

#### **b. Training**

It's been said that "excellence is an art won by training and habituation." For Harbor Patrol, training remains the cornerstone of its readiness to accomplish a range of tasks.

In addition to maintaining a Coast Guard Master's license with towing endorsement, EMT certification, and passing a firearms course before being hired, Harbor Patrol Officers earn "Core Training Certification" through courses provided primarily by the California Department of Boating and Waterways. Those courses include Boating Safety and Enforcement, Marine Firefighting, Rescue Boat Operations, Vessel Accident Investigation and (Accident) Reconstruction, Piloting and Navigation, and Boating Under the Influence.

Additional training is extensive and recurring. At the California Specialized Training Institute in San Luis Obispo, for example, officers train in live-fire and “simunition” exercises in real-life scenarios. Locally, they qualify with an in-house FBI trained firearms instructor every 90 days, in scenarios like low-light firing, shooting from the ground, offshore boat shoot, and clearing gun jams. They also train jointly with the Police Department’s SWAT Team, City firefighters, National Response Center, and Coast Guard personnel on everything from hostage scenarios to marina fires, emergency medical response, at-sea rescues, and oil-spill response. For oil-spill response, Patrol has 1,600 feet of small absorbent boom to contain small spills (which it has done several times) and 1,000 feet of hard boom for booming off the harbor mouth in case of a major spill in the Santa Barbara Channel. Additionally, there is up to 5,000 feet available from the National Response Center.

Officers maintain Emergency Medical Technician and Red Cross Lifeguard Certifications, and attend specialized training such as Beach Driving, Best Management Practices for Underwater Hull Cleaning, and Police Response to People with Mental Illness or Developmental Disabilities. Finally, Harbor Patrol designates an in-house Defensive and Firearms instructor who takes specialized “train the trainer” classes, then trains Patrol Officers in areas like defense against edged weapons, ground fighting, controlled force, weapons retention, water survival, martial arts, and firearms training.

Each officer aims to complete a minimum of 80 hours of training per year. Despite COVID-19 health and safety restrictions combined with budgets constraints, Patrol has been able to maintain the goal of 80 hours of training this year.

### **c. Public Relations**

Informing the public about Harbor Patrol’s mission remains a Departmental priority. Patrol Officers conduct at least 45 class tours or other public-relations events per year. These typically include school tours on the patrol boats, plus orientations and ride-alongs for citizens, public officials, and rookie firefighters and police officers. Patrol also participates in the City’s annual Safety Fair, during which the public interacts with officers and gets a close-up look at PB #4. Officers also rely heavily on foot patrols (discussed later in this report) to engage the public on a personal level.

## **2. Other Performance Measures**

In addition to these measurable objectives, several performance measures offer a broad view of the types of activities, calls, rescues, and responses Harbor Patrol undertakes.

### **a. Calls For Service**

Calls for service, that is, response to requests generated from “the outside” via phone, City PD Dispatch or VHF marine radio, range from checking Waterfront facilities to boating emergencies, medical calls, enforcement calls, fires, public complaints, response

to shark sightings, and more. Response to these is known as “running calls.” From 2016 to 2019 Patrol averaged 2100 calls for service per year. That number dropped to 1204 in 2020 due to COVID-19.

**b. Emergency Responses Outside the Harbor**

Over the past five years Patrol averaged 104 emergency responses outside the harbor which comprise some of Patrol’s most dangerous calls, include vessels either capsized, taking on water, or sinking in storms, plus kite surfers down or lost in the fog, boats dragging anchor in the East Beach anchorage, surfer assists (40 in one day in February, 2008) and medical emergencies aboard ship. Many of these calls result in emergency vessel tows, which also number around 67 per year.

Owing to sheer proximity, Patrol also responds to medical calls at Waterfront hotels, traffic accidents on or near Cabrillo Boulevard and Shoreline Drive and emergency calls at Santa Barbara City College (e.g. sports injuries at the SBCC field).

**c. Non-Emergency Vessel Tows**

Harbor Patrol typically averages over 337 non-emergency (or “courtesy”) vessel tows per year, with that number dropping to 138 in 2020 due to strict enforcement of the vessel operability code. Courtesy tows typically include towing boats to their slips, towing boats to Harbor Marine Works’ Travel Lift for haul-out, or moving boats during storms or construction projects.

**d. Enforcement Contacts**

From 2016 to 2019, Patrol averaged 2,275 enforcement contacts per year, dropping to 1,321 in 2020, likely due to individuals being homebound during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contacts are typically made for infractions such as improper boating equipment (life jackets, lights, signaling devices), operating boats in swim areas, operating boats without proper registration, unauthorized entry into marinas or restrooms, public disturbance, open alcohol containers in public, illegal camping, (minor) ocean pollution and illegal berthing. More serious contacts include major ocean pollution, BUI, trespass aboard boats in the marina, domestic violence, assaults (usually fistfights), possession of illegal drugs, and warrant arrests. These contacts often involve agency backup from PD, Sheriffs, or Coast Guard. Most enforcement contacts result in warnings, though some result in citations (officially considered cite-and-release “arrests”) and fewer still result in a suspect being taken to jail. Arrests average over 165 per year.

**e. Parking Citations**

Logged separately from arrests, Waterfront parking citations average over 673 per year. They are typically issued for 72-hour violations, red-zone violations, time-restricted violations (i.e. 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. parking prohibitions), expired registration, and

parking in handicapped stalls. City PD's Parking Enforcement Officers, meanwhile, enforce 90-minute regulations in designated areas of Waterfront Parking Lots such as Harbor West and the Leadbetter Lot, plus 90-minute zones in Harbor Way.

**f. Motor Patrols**

Motor patrols, undertaken in a Ford F-250 truck, average over 2,545 per year. Motor patrols are used to monitor all landside areas of the Waterfront for parking violations, physical disturbances, illegal camping, vandalism, facilities safety checks, and general safety hazards. Officers also patrol Waterfront beaches looking for debris and safety hazards like broken glass, as well as illegal drinking or drug use. From Labor Day to Memorial Day, when City Lifeguard towers are not staffed, officers on motor patrol keep an extra keen eye on the surf, looking out for emergencies.

**g. Foot Patrols**

Averaging over 3,069 per year, foot patrols are an important facet of community relations. They give officers a chance to meet directly with boaters to personalize relations and hear any complaints or issues of concern. Foot patrols also allow officers to better address marina-related enforcement issues not easily addressed by boat or truck, such as dogs off leash, dock obstructions, vessel overhangs, inadequate shore-power cords, and illegal live-aboards. Officers also use this opportunity to check Waterfront facilities, ensuring restrooms, fire alarms, marina gates, vessel storage areas on West Beach and Leadbetter Beach, and local businesses are secure.

**h. Boat Patrols**

Boat patrols are conducted by Patrol's four rescue boats. From 2016 to 2020, Patrol averaged 1,479 boat patrols per year. Boat patrols take place within the harbor as well as patrolling the ocean front at which time officers typically interact with the boating community answering questions as well as educating the public on boating safety and enforcing maritime laws. Due to the increase in the number of people recreating on the water, Patrol makes numerous contacts to kayakers and SUPs not wearing PFDs.

**i. Bird Rescues**

The protection of avian life is a stated goal of the Waterfront's Clean Marina Program. Harbor Patrol rescued four birds in FY '21, working with Stearns Wharf Bait and Tackle to help educate Wharf fishermen and with the Wildlife Care Network (WCN) to save ailing birds whenever possible. Patrol keeps "carry cages" stored and ready for transport to the WCN, and officers have become well acquainted with capture techniques, often successfully extracting fish hooks or marine debris from fouled birds.

**j. Marine Mammal Rescues**

Harbor Patrol typically rescues about 39 seals and sea lions a year, ensuring their safe transport to the Channel Islands Marine & Wildlife Institute's (CIMWI) facility. That number has dropped to 3 in 2020 primarily due to CIMWI and the amazing work they do rescuing injured marine mammals. Rescuing marine mammals can be dangerous work, as the animals often weigh several hundred pounds apiece. Occasionally Patrol has been asked to help protect wayward gray whales or dolphin that swim into the harbor, working in cooperation with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Patrol also works closely with CIMWI and the City Parks and Recreation Department to verify shark sightings and facilitate the posting of City beaches, as necessary. Finally, Patrol is sometimes—albeit rarely—asked to rescue other animals, like dogs, or, in the rarest case of all, a show horse that swam nearly four miles to sea, only to be gently towed back by Harbor Patrol aboard PB #1.

**CONCLUSION**

Harbor Patrol often operates out of the public view—on the ocean where its duties and accomplishments go largely unnoticed. Staff hopes this report has shed light not only on Patrol Officers' day-to-day responsibilities, but on their commitment to the City and Waterfront community alike.

Attachment: Santa Barbara Harbor Patrol Performance Measures 2020-2021

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