STEARNS WHARF INSPECTIONS
A Diver’s Perspective of the Harsh Marine Environment
Karl Treiberg, Waterfront Facilities Manager

Stearns Wharf remains the poster child for effects of a harsh marine environment on Waterfront facilities. It’s not so much the knobby deck boards that rattle your fillings while driving on the Wharf, but deterioration that only a scuba diver can see.

With over 1,500 wooden piles supporting the Wharf, the only way to inspect them is with SCUBA gear. The Waterfront’s experienced dive crew inspects 500 piles each year, from the seafloor to supporting timbers just below the Wharf deck. The piles have a specialized wrap or coating that minimizes water intrusion, but it’s not impermeable. Water, with its attendant wood-eating organisms, eventually gets in and starts the deterioration process.

The pile is graded on how much of the cross-section has rotted away, usually courtesy of shipworms (Teredo navalis). They then cut away the coating to confirm how much of a pile’s cross-section has rotted away, usually courtesy of shipworms (Teredo navalis). The pile is graded on how much of the cross-section is gone. Piles identified as having major or severe deterioration are typically included in the Department’s annual pile-driving project. Fortunately, the City has highly qualified marine contractors routinely bidding on the work.

This year’s work was completed in early April, keeping Stearns Wharf structurally sound for another year. And then we’ll do it again...
Vendors occupied a record 77 stalls at the 10th annual Nautical Swap Meet on May 25th, dishing out bargain deals for fishing rods and reels, kayaks, paddle boards, surfboards, anchors, charts, nautical art, dive gear, shark teeth, ship’s compasses, sailboat rigging, and more.

The event was sponsored by Waterfront Department and Harbor Merchants Association, the latter supplying free donuts, coffee, bagels, and fruit.

Santa Barbara’s Fourth of July celebration brought thousands of people to the Waterfront to enjoy a family-friendly day and night. Amid ideal weather conditions, visitors enjoyed live music on Stearns Wharf and West Beach from noon until the 9 p.m. fireworks display.

Waterfront revenues for Fiscal Year 2019 (July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019) are expected to meet budget projections. The Department continues to maintain 100% occupancy in slip and lease rentals, and Stearns Wharf and the Harbor continue to grow in popularity as visitor destinations.

During Fiscal Year 2020 (July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020), the Department expects to fund approximately $2.4M in capital improvements.

Existing projects that will continue in FY 2020 include: the Parking Lot Maintenance Program ($70,000), which will focus on the Cabrillo East Slip and West parking lots; the Marina Renovation Program ($275,000), which includes replacing dock hitches, dock boxes, power centers, and utilities in various marinas; and the Stearns Wharf Heavy Timber and Pile Replacement Program ($475,000).

New projects for FY 2020 include: Replacing the 117’ Alley Trench Drain ($125,000); replacing Hoses #1 and #2 on the City Pier ($125,000); interior remodel of 132-A offices ($125,000); updating the Department’s Security Camera System ($150,000); installing an ADA-compliant gangway at the Accommodation Dock for visiting boaters ($225,000); and complete replacement of the Ice House on the City Pier ($600,000).

Waterfront staff reviewed the proposed Fiscal Year 2020 budget, including proposed fee changes, with the Harbor Commission in February and March 2019. City Council reviewed the Waterfront Department’s proposed budget at a May 6th work session, and the City’s Finance Committee reviewed the proposed fee adjustments on May 14th. City Council adopted the City’s overall budget on June 18th. The entire City budget can be found on the City of Santa Barbara’s Finance Department homepage at www.santabarbaraca.gov/gov/depts/finance/budget.

As in prior years, fee increases are necessary to complete these projects, maintain the Harbor, Stearns Wharf, and other Waterfront facilities, and keep the Department’s emergency and construction reserves at required levels.

Fee adjustments beginning July 1, 2019:
1. Slip Permit fee increase of 1%
2. Live Aboard Permit monthly fee reduction of $30, to a new rate of $120
3. A monthly fee for electricity used at each slip, pursuant to the Marina Electric Submetering Program
4. Slip Permit transfer fee increase of $2.5 per foot for slips above 30 feet in length. The increase does not include 20, 25, 28 or 30-foot slips, or designated Commercial Fishing Slips
5. Annual West Beach Rack Permit fee increase from $1,100 to $1,150

Here are some things to remember, for your safety, your neighbors’ safety, and ease of access:
1. Only a dock step of approved size and weight is allowed (see #8 in Marina Rules and Regulations for dimensions)
2. Maintain navigable fairways between fingers of #8 in Marina Rules and Regulations
3. Store your skiff or kayak within your assigned slip space
4. Maintain your dock lines and keep walkways clear. Fairways narrow and keep the Department’s emergency and construction reserves at required levels.
5. Keep the dock around your vessel free of debris and obstructions

Complying with these rules will help enhance dock safety, make good neighbors, and ensure emergency access. Thanks in advance for your teamwork on these fronts!

Maintaining a clean harbor environment for people, aquatic life, and seabirds has long been a priority for the Waterfront Department. In fact, back in 2002, our harbor was one of the first in California to adopt a Clean Marina Program.

A key element of the Clean Marina Program is pollution prevention. To help achieve that goal, the Department operates waste-oil disposal stations at the Fuel Dock, Marina 2, and Marina 4. These free facilities also accept oil filters, antifreeze, and oil-absorbent bilge pads. The idea is to offer boaters an easy and convenient way to properly dispose of hazardous waste and keep it out of the water. Judging by results, the system works. Last year, 5,700 gallons of used oil was collected at the stations and the total from 2011 to 2018 was over 45,000 gallons.

To further facilitate the proper disposal of waste oil, the Waterfront also holds a special Hazardous Waste Collection event concurrently with its Nautical Swap Meet every year. But hazardous waste disposal is expensive. To help with the costs of these important services, the Waterfront Department has participated in the California Department of Resources’ Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) Used Oil Payment Program since 2010. Program payments can be used for collection, education, and outreach. A portion of the money even supports the publication of Docklines. Last year, the Program awarded the Waterfront Department the $25,967. Future plans for OPP money include updating and improving the used-oil collection facility at the Fuel Dock.

While the Department works to make the proper disposal of used oil easy, boaters need to do their part. Recently, the collection facilities have been more accessible than usual, with boaters leaving used filters on top of drums or simply leaving buckets of oil on the floor inside the facilities. Questions about the proper way to dispose of used oil in our facilities? Call Harbor Maintenance at 564-5522.