

GOOD TIMES

A Fish Mass Suicide

Decaying anchovies wreak havoc on harbor 7-26-84

THE anchovy mass suicide Saturday has left almost 200 tons of the decomposing fish in the Yacht Harbor, with the subsequent acid residue corroding boat bottoms.

The anchovies died after becoming trapped in the harbor and depleting their oxygen supply, said Harbor Master Steve Scheiblauder. No explanation was given for why the

fish didn't simply swim into open waters before the lack of oxygen began killing them.

The clean-up is expected to continue well into August as workers scrub the dock and the harbor's rock rim. The smell of decomposing fish should get worse through the week-end and remain strong for several days after that, said Scheiblauder.

Similar mass deaths have mucked up the harbor in 1964, 1974 and 1980, each in the first week of August. Fish-kill defenses get better after each incident, but "we still end up trying to second-guess the fish and out-think nature," said Scheiblauder.

About 100 groups of anchovies swim in and out of the harbor every year, varying in size. The huge school that entered the harbor Saturday took only two hours to consume most of the oxygen supply and overwhelm the harbor's defense system. Cleanup operations began only four hours after the school swam into the harbor.

Future work to minimize the anchovies effect include tripling existing efforts to mechanically aerate the water. Besides keeping trapped fish alive, the added oxygen helps dead fish decay into water and carbon dioxide rather than into damaging hydrogen sulfide. •

