

Anchovies apparently rebuffed

8-28-85
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SANTA CRUZ — Schools of anchovies that attempted to enter the Small Craft Harbor all day Tuesday have retreated after a new fish net especially designed to prevent a massive kill appeared to keep them from entering the inlet.

In the past, anchovies by the millions have charged into the harbor, where they deplete the oxygen supply and die. The massive anchovy kill sends up a stench, and the dead fish damage the hulls of boats in the harbor.

Harbor crews hoisted a large net Monday across the harbor mouth to prevent tons of anchovies from assaulting the harbor and requiring an expensive clean-up operation.

Harbormaster Steve Scheiblaue said this morning that large schools of mature fish still are off the shoreline, and there is a potential for a large kill. But the harbor is safe for the moment.

"We had a pretty good fight with them all day yesterday," Scheiblaue said. "But the fish have left the harbor."

The custom-made net, which was installed about a month ago, broke at one point Monday from the force of tons of fish pressing against it. But it was repaired within 10 minutes. The net, used this week for the first time, cost \$7,000 and is made with miniature mesh to keep fish from getting their gills snagged in it.

Port District Director Brian Foss said Tuesday that if the circumstances look exactly right for a massive anchovy kill, the harbor may be forced to warn boaters that if they leave the harbor, they may be unable to return.

That could be particularly inconvenient this weekend, when the annual Windjammer race takes place from San Francisco to the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf. At least 100 boats are expected to participate.

Scheiblaue said the net was down this morning. When it is in place, harbor crews lower the net for passing boats when the fish are a safe distance away.