



By Gary Fong

Two youths used rakes and nets to scoop up dead and dying anchovies that clogged Santa Cruz harbor

Mass Death of Anchovies in Santa Cruz

Santa Cruz

Hundreds of young people were hired yesterday to join local officials and worried boat owners in a massive effort to haul away millions of smelly dead anchovies that have clogged the Santa Cruz harbor since Monday.

"There's probably over 400 tons of anchovies out there," said assistant harbor master Bill Shaw. "They decay so fast, and that produces an oil that will strip the bottom paint right off a boat."

"And the stench is horrible."

Annual migrations of the tiny fish are common to the Santa Cruz area, officials said, but it's been six years since the harbor has been inundated with so many dead and dying anchovies.

Jerry Spratt, a marine biologist for the state Department of Fish and Game in Monterey, speculated that the anchovies were either fleeing predators or a so-called red tide, in which the surface is blanketed with blooming red plankton.

"They get in there in such concentration that they use up the oxygen," said Spratt. "And their

waste products produce a high level of ammonia in the water and more die off."

More than 100 young persons and California Conservation Corps workers armed with swimming pool skimmers and a variety of nets and buckets were paid \$4 an hour by harbor officials yesterday to scoop up the anchovies and cart them to dump trucks in a nearby parking lot.

Officials also brought in four septic tank pump trucks to aid in the cleanup and used fire hoses to drive clumps of the dead fish toward workers on the dock and in

small boats.

Spratt said many of the fish were being taken to a Salinas tallow works, where they are processed into fish meal for use as a high-protein supplement in poultry feed.

The bulk of the dead fish was hauled away yesterday, but officials expected the cleanup would continue for several days.

Fishing for anchovies in the Santa Cruz harbor is illegal without a permit, but the regulation has been waived during the current crisis, Spratt said.

Our Correspondent