

Harbor's only boatyard rescued

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Port District agrees to fund \$150,000 wastewater-filtration system

By JOHN ROBINSON
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — The cost of clean ocean water could have forced Harbor Marine, the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor's only boat-repair yard, to close had the Port District not agreed last month to help fund a water filtration system.

"The question became, 'do we want a boatyard or not?'" said Port Director Brian Foss. "Everyone agreed that we do. This is the cost of staying alive in the '90s and the cost of environmental compliance."

Under federal and state regulations, boatyards must install filtration systems to treat storm water runoff, to ensure that toxics from paint and other boat materials don't reach the ocean.

The cost of meeting the regulations has closed dozens of small boatyards around the San Francisco Bay Area over the past two years.

"This has been happening all over (the state) and the only ones to survive the cost of this are the large ones," Foss said.

Harbor Marine faced the same fate: spend \$150,000 for a filtration system or close down.

"There's no way we could have complied on our own," said Dave Dawson, Harbor Marine owner. "We would have become a very different operation. We might not have closed but become very limited."

The Port District had been working to meet the regulations at Harbor Marine over the past several years, rebuilding storm drains on the property so they met at a central point and installing conduits for wiring and plumbing the system.

The system is designed to catch and filter the first 4,000 gallons of

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runoff. During heavy rains, only the first 4,000 gallons are treated; this water contains most of the contaminants. The filter system — a series of fine meshes — will remove heavy metals and other pollutants from the water.

According to Dawson, the cost of the project, including paving, building a seawall and other work is nearly \$1.5 million, most of which has been paid for through a series of government and other grants.

While the Port District, and other agencies have helped, Harbor Marine was left with paying for the final and most expensive component, the filter system.

"It's something we wanted to do, but it's just so expensive," Dawson said.

The Port District concluded that the business has gross income of \$750,000 but operates on a thin profit margin caused in part by high insurance and worker's compensation costs.

"We don't think it is financially feasible for the operator to do it by himself," Foss said. "It was a matter of time (before the yard closed) or us assisting him."

Harbor Marine offers the only complete boat rehabilitation services at the harbor and has the only crane capable of launching and removing the largest 300 boats at the harbor. Their machinery also helps retrieve three or four boats a

year that sink in the harbor.

"We think it is a necessary service to have," Foss said.

According to the Port District study, environmental regulations are expected to get even more severe and may soon outlaw even the sanding of hulls and other routine maintenance done by many boat owners. If so, then boatyards such as Harbor Marine will be even

more needed.

"This is the only safe haven for industrial fallout anywhere in this part of the coast," Dawson said. "As government regulations get tougher, there needs to be a place like this where you can sand and scrub boats."

Under the Port District plan, passed 5-0 by the Port Commission last month, Harbor Marine will have to obtain financing for the filtration system and maintain it.

To offset the costs, the port will reduce Harbor Marine's rent by an amount equivalent to their payments on the system, which are expected to run about \$2,000 a month. Harbor Marine's rent will drop from about \$40,000 to \$15,000 per year. Harbor Marine will also have to pay more than \$12,000 a year to maintain the system.