

Unattended Boats' Owners Will Pay Electricity Fee

By JOHN McNICHOLAS
Sentinel Staff Writer

Owners of unattended boats in the Small Craft Harbor which use harbor electricity will begin in August paying a surcharge for the power they use.

At its Tuesday night meeting, the Port Commission approved a rate schedule for the surcharge, and the ordinance now covering power use in the harbor will be changed and approved at commission's next meeting.

The commission also approved an ordinance which will allow the harbormaster to disconnect any improperly wired vessel which may be leaking current into the water and corroding metal fittings on nearby boats.

Harbormaster Steve Scheiblaue said the annual PG&E bill for the harbor has been as high as \$70,000 recently. He attributed much of this to appliances aboard vessels in which the owners do not live.

Boat owners leave water heaters, freezers, refrigerators and space heaters running while they are not there, Scheiblaue said. This use could account for as much as \$50,000 in power costs, he said.

The Port District may realize as much as \$30,000 from the surcharges, he estimated.

"Once people find they have to pay, they'll become more conservative. If they don't, we would probably make \$50,000, but people will disconnect."

The ordinance defines an unattended boat as one upon which no one lives, or on

which no one is working or spending time.

Additionally, the 150-watt limit on power now in effect will be lifted. Boat owners will be able to use as much power as they need, but will have to pay for it.

Boats upon which people live do not fall under the ordinance change. Their power is paid for in the live-aboard fees charged to them.

The "stray current" ordinance will allow the harbormaster to disconnect harbor power to any boat which is improperly grounded.

Such current corrodes fittings not only on the offending boats, but can affect any metal in the water up to 50 feet away.

If any vessel is found to produce stray current, the owners will be given a "reasonable" amount of time to correct it, the ordinance states — about a month, according to Scheiblaue. If after a month the problem persists, a 10-day notice will be sent the owners, and at the end of 10 days the power may be disconnected.

"A common cure for stray current is not to have the boat grounded at all," the harbormaster said. "But the ground is for safety: you expose yourself to electrocution without it."

A three-wire grounded cord is specified in the the ordinance.

All boats in the harbor connected to the power supply will be checked monthly for stray current, and all unattended boats which are hooked up will be metered to determine the amount of electricity used.

An ordinance to charge for visitors and guests to the harbor was tabled for further study by the commissioners.