

# Cleaner Harbor a Skim Away

New machines at work removing trash from the Oceanside Harbor

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Oceanside Harbor maintenance worker Jon Perkins scoops trash out of one of the city's new skimmers on Friday morning. The city recently purchased two of the devices, which help remove debris from the water. — *Edward Sifuentes*

**OCEANSIDE** — A pair of new skimmers are making it easier to keep the water clean in Oceanside's municipal harbor, alleviating one of the most frequent complaints from visitors and boat owners: trash and muck in the water.

The machines — installed about two months ago on the south side of the harbor, near popular eateries such as Joe's Crab Shack — can each remove up to 500 pounds of trash from the water a month, city maintenance workers say. Trash and oils that would collect in the area, after being pushed there by the tides and currents, are trapped by the skimmers, which operate 24 hours a day.

“This area used to be bad,” said Jon Perkins, a maintenance worker scooping trash out of one of machines Friday morning. “We would try and do what we could, but I can’t believe how good it looks now.”

Built by Marina Trash Skimmer, a Bellingham, Wa.-based company, the machines look like trash containers — about six feet wide by four feet deep — that float on the water. An electric motor sucks in about 300 gallons of water a minute into the device and filters the water trapping debris, such as paper cups, plastic containers and dead marine plants.

Maintenance workers remove the trash daily because the skimmers will automatically shut down if they overflow or clog.

The machines are fastened to a commercial dock on the eastern end of the south harbor. One is on the northern end of the dock and one at the southern end, near the Helgren’s Sportfishing building.

Opened in 1963, the Cape Cod-style harbor village is one of the city’s most beloved attractions. Popular restaurants, hotels and boat rental shops line the water. The Oceanside Yacht Club sits on the northern edge near a fence that separates the city from Camp Pendleton.

The harbor has about 1,000 boat slips and is home to several whale watching, commercial and sport fishing operations.

Keeping the area clean has been a constant challenge.

The city purchased the skimmers at a cost of \$10,000 each, said Oceanside Harbor Manager Paul Lawrence. He said the pair are doing such a good job that the city may soon buy two more.

“We are looking at other natural collection points for marina debris in the harbor, where the skimmers could do the most good,” Lawrence said. “I would expect one or two more skimmers in the next few months.”

The skimmers are also beneficial to sea life, he said, because by churning the water they add oxygen attracting marine animals to the area.

Maintenance workers said that, previously, keeping the harbor waters clean and clear of trash was an impossible and time consuming task. In addition to city

crews, Oceanside contracted with H2O Trash Patrol, a nonprofit organization that uses paddle boards to collect trash from the water.

Perkins said the skimmers filter trash that is too difficult for human eyes to see, such as small pieces of clear plastic. It also collects oils and scum. Absorbent pads are placed inside the skimmers that soak up oil and oil-based fluids.

Lawrence said he was familiar with the benefits of the devices because the Dana Point Harbor, where he worked as operations manager before he was hired in Oceanside, installed several skimmers in 2011 to clean the water.

The Port of San Diego also installed Marina Trash Skimmers at four marinas in San Diego Bay in 2009. The agency conducted a study of the devices over an eight month period and concluded that the “program was deemed a success because of the sheer volume of debris removed from the marina water, the increased observable clarity of the water and the satisfaction of the marinas and their tenants.”

At one of the marinas, the skimmer removed over 6,400 gallons of trash over the eight month period, the agency reported.

“Not only do they improve the aesthetics of their marina but the skimmers are easy to use, silent, and save the marina time and money by reducing the marina staff’s workload,” according to the report.