

Harbor director plans post-tsunami town hall meeting: Another boat sinks, one nearly goes amid heavy rain

J.M. Brown, Santa Cruz Sentinel, 3-26-11

SANTA CRUZ -- Two weeks after a tsunami hit the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor, a boat docked to the heavily battered U Dock sunk Friday and another nearly went under a day after heavy rains enveloped the coast.

Deputy Harbormaster Ernie Winsor said divers used air bags to lift the sunken boat.

"We think that with the surge, one of the exhaust vents may have been torn off and that caused it to take on water," he said.

Winsor said the partially submerged boat came from the neighboring V Dock, where crews had to pump water out to keep it afloat. It was not clear whether tsunami damage or the storm that began Thursday were to blame in either case.

But Tony Lewandowski, whose Carver 33 named "JustUs" that fully sunk, said a lack of power on the damaged U dock prevented his bilge pumps from running. He had no boat insurance because he planned to sell the boat.

"I hope that federal aid comes in quick," he said.

But tsunami damage statewide has not risen to the threshold of \$44 million that would allow Sacramento to apply for federal assistance. In the meantime, Port Director Lisa Ekers, who returned from Washington this week after a pre-planned trip to seek funding for the harbor, has planned a town hall meeting for Tuesday to discuss the harbor's recovery.

Ekers will host the public meeting "to talk to our customers, hear their suggestions" on rebuilding the 827-slip harbor and how to accommodate those who lost their boats. Nine boats were fully sunk by the tsunami, which was triggered by the massive earthquake in Japan on March 11, and five were nearly sunk.

"People have been incredibly patient and there are a lot of people asking questions about what the future is for access to their boats," Ekers said.

The harbor fully reopened to vessel traffic Wednesday and recovery work is ongoing, but Ekers said she wanted to work on restoring capacity before salmon season opens April 2.

"We want to hear from our slip renters on what their needs and ideas are," she said.