



LOS ANGELES
WATERKEEPER®

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Future Is Bright for Marina del Rey Harbor's Toxic Water

Amendment to Regulate Copper Discharged from Boats In Marina del Rey Harbor Is Passed

February 6, 2014 (Marina del Rey, CA) — In an effort to protect and improve water quality in Marina del Rey Harbor, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board's ("Regional Board") Marina del Rey Harbor Draft Copper Water Quality Plan to reduce the amount of copper in Marina del Rey Harbor by 85% in 10 years has passed by a vote of 6-0. Los Angeles Waterkeeper participated in the public comment period and testified at the Regional Board's February 6th hearing in support of this action.

Marina del Rey Harbor, one of the most toxic harbors on the west coast, is known for water recreation, marine and wildlife habitat, shellfish harvesting, and commercial and sports fishing. In addition to the nearly 5,000 boat owners in the Harbor, this new regulation will positively impact recreational businesses, shopping venues, and nearby hospitality businesses because the Harbor will be cleaner and safer.

Concentrations of copper in the waters of the Marina del Harbor are at levels harmful to organisms living in the harbor. Copper is used in most antifouling paints, which are specialized coatings applied to the bottom of a ship or boat in order to slow the growth of organisms that attach to the boat. Over time the copper leaches out of the paint into the water where it negatively affects organisms by accumulating in fish tissue that is later ingested by other organisms including humans, causing gill and nervous system damage in fish, and killing invertebrates that make up the base of the food chain. In order to protect aquatic life in the Harbor and Santa Monica Bay and activities that depend on a healthy aquatic system, such as sport fishing, recreation and wildlife habitat, the amount of copper must be reduced.

"Marina del Rey Harbor is not just a gateway to the Santa Monica Bay, it's a fishing spot and recreational area in and of itself," said Lara Meeker, Watershed Program Manager for Los Angeles Waterkeeper. "The harbor is home to many species, including some that were here back when it was a wetland, and it's a valuable public resource that is being degraded. The Regional Board's sources assessment analysis estimates that more than three tons of copper leach into the marina from resident boats every year."

Los Angeles Waterkeeper works to protect and restore Santa Monica Bay, San Pedro Bay, and adjacent waters including the LA River, Ballona Creek, and Marina del Rey through enforcement, fieldwork, and community action. The boat, "Waterkeeper," is used for Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Watch and Kelp Restoration programs, and has been docked in Marina del Rey Harbor for over 10 years. As leaders of environmental practice, LA Waterkeeper switched to non-copper based paint on their boat 5 years ago, and strongly supports the new amendment requiring boat owners to do the same.

“A few years ago we worked with a local boatyard to find a copper-free paint that worked for our needs,” said Brian Meux, Marine Program Manager for LA Waterkeeper. “I’m very pleased with the results, combining functionality and performance with reducing the copper load to the Marina del Rey Harbor and the Santa Monica Bay.”

The Regional Board’s Plan allots 10 years to reduce copper discharge in the Harbor by 85%. Options for boat owners include switching from copper-based to non-toxic anti-fouling paints, use of slip liners, and use of less-abrasive hull cleaning techniques, and the Regional Board has committed to supporting grant programs that will help offset the cost to boaters.

“As a sailor, I take pride on cruising with low-impact. It pains me to know that the paint on my boat is creating a toxic environment for fish and wildlife in the Marina, “ said Dylan Gasperik, Marina del Rey Harbor boat owner. “The price of converting to alternative paints will be steep, but federal assistance like they received in San Diego and Newport would certainly help soften the blow.”

Two marinas in Southern California already have similar TMDLs in place to reduce copper in the water: Shelter Island Yacht Basin in San Diego and Newport Bay in Orange County. Stephen Auerbach sails his wing keel C-240 out of Newport Harbor, and switched from copper paint to non-toxic alternatives with no problems.

“I have had this paint on for almost 2 years now, and it is my hope that one day all boats have a similar type of paint, said Auerbach. “I must admit, I was a little skeptical at first, but now I am proud of making the place in which we live better.”

For further information, please contact Rachel Stich at (310) 394-6162 x108.

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ABOUT LOS ANGELES WATERKEEPER

Founded in 1993, Los Angeles Waterkeeper’s mission is to protect and restore Santa Monica Bay, San Pedro Bay, and adjacent waters through enforcement, fieldwork, and community action. It works to achieve this goal through litigation and regulatory programs that ensure water quality protections in waterways throughout L.A. County. Los Angeles Waterkeeper’s Litigation & Advocacy, Marine, and Water Quality teams conduct interconnected projects that serve this mission.