

## **WASHINGTON FIREFIGHTER INJURED IN TRAINING ACCIDENT**

<http://www.firefighterclosecalls.net/news/fullstory/newsid/28114>

**Tuesday, March 21, 2006**

ABERDEEN, Wash. An Ocean Shores firefighter is in critical condition today at Seattle's Virginia Mason Hospital. Captain Rob McLaughlin was injured yesterday (Monday) in a surf-rescue training accident. Ocean Shores Fire Lieutenant Russ Fitts says McLaughlin was thrown from a personal watercraft about 100 yards off the beach north of Ocean Shores. McLaughlin has been a member of the surf-rescue team for about a year, The accident is being investigated by the Grays Harbor County sheriff's department.



### **Firefighter critically injured in surf rescue training**

[http://www.thedailyworld.com/articles/2006/03/21/local\\_news/02news.txt](http://www.thedailyworld.com/articles/2006/03/21/local_news/02news.txt)

March 21, 2006 **By Paula Horton - Daily World Writer**

A 40-year-old Ocean Shores Fire Department captain working to get an advanced certification for the city's surf rescue team is in critical condition at a Seattle hospital this morning after being pitched into the surf when his personal watercraft capsized Monday afternoon.

Capt. Rob McLaughlin, who joined the Ocean Shores Police Surf Rescue Team last July, was a passenger on the watercraft that was maneuvering through the surf line just north of Ocean Shores, Police Lt. Russ Fitts said.

Firefighter/paramedic Curt Begley, who is also new to the rescue team and working to get his personal watercraft certification, was the driver.

"We purposely, at times, dump vessels out in the water so we can get back on them, but in this case they hit a wave wrong and it capsized the vessel," Fitts said.

Begley was able to get back on the watercraft, but McLaughlin became separated. Police Sgt. Paul Luck, a senior team member and instructor, was about 50 yards away on his own personal watercraft and attempted to pick up McLaughlin. Breaking surf conditions prevented Luck from getting to McLaughlin right away.

When McLaughlin became unresponsive, Luck jumped in the ocean and

signaled to the on-shore observer that he needed help. McLaughlin, who was in the water for about 10 minutes, was stabilized and carried to shore. He was rushed to Grays Harbor Community Hospital in Aberdeen and airlifted to Seattle's Virginia Mason Hospital.

"He had no external injuries from the incident," Fitts said, adding that it's unknown if a medical condition was a contributing factor. "We're not exactly sure what happened with him. ... There is a lot of stress put on the body with the surf conditions, water conditions and temperature. I'm sure everything comes into play."

The Grays Harbor Sheriff's Office is investigating because the accident happened in the county's jurisdiction, Undersheriff Rick Scott said. "We're trying to get together with all the officers involved to get a clearer picture" of what happened, Scott said.

The state Department of Labor & Industries is also expected to investigate, Fitts said.

As part of the personal watercraft certification, team members learn how to recognize and avoid waves, and pick up and drop off swimmers in the surf line. The men were about 100 yards off shore.

McLaughlin is one of three Ocean Shores Fire Department personnel on the 12-member Police Surf Rescue Team, which was formed in 1989. He is qualified as a rescue swimmer, the basic level of training for a surf rescue team member, Fitts said.

McLaughlin, who started as a volunteer firefighter in Ocean Shores, was hired at the department in October of 1996.

Through 2004, the surf rescue team had responded to 162 calls and made 87 rescues. Nine people have drowned, including three in 2002. The team's average response time is 3.7 minutes.

Eight years ago, Ocean Shores Police Lt. Jim Davis drowned during a surf rescue mission with the team when the inflatable boat he was in overturned.

Both Luck and Fitts were on the rescue operation with Davis.

"To have someone get injured is tough," Fitts said. "We accept that with the territory. It's a precarious situation we put ourselves in to kind of familiarize, get comfortable and know our limitations.

"It's something we'll look back on."

## 'Rob Was A Fireman All The Way'

<http://www.komotv.com/news/printstory.asp?id=42542>

March 22, 2006 By [Keith Eldridge](#)

OCEAN SHORES - A memorial has now been set for Mar. 29 to honor Ocean Shores firefighter Rob McLaughlin, who died in a surf rescue training exercise.

The Surf Rescue Team is run by the Ocean Shores Police Department, but with three members of the fire department. Fire Capt. McLaughlin was one of them.



McLaughlin spent 20 years as a firefighter paramedic, but this was his first year on the Surf Rescue Team. Monday he was out training in the heavy surf of Ocean Shores when he and his partner were tossed out of their personal watercraft.

"Basically, we were out training and we both got knocked off the watercraft," said surf rescuer Curt Begley. "I didn't see much after we got off the craft because the trainer was out there and took Rob and started in with him. I was out there and lost sight of them until we got to the beach. We just came off a wave a little sideways and we lost the craft and away we went."

Begley says he didn't think much of it because they train to get tossed into the water.

"I lost sight of him when the instructor started taking him to the beach. I was trying to get back on the watercraft and taking the waves as they came," he said. "I was basically staying out there until they got Rob to the beach and then come pick me up. As time went by I realized he's not coming back as quick as he should so it's time for me to start working my way back in."

Police Lt. Russ Fitts of the Surf Rescue Team says, "One of our officers tried to assist him back onto his personal watercraft he couldn't make it up on board. Subsequently we handed him another floatation device and he had a tough time holding onto that. And as the officer was calling for additional help he went back to see him floating in the water and brought him to shore."

McLaughlin was in full floatation gear and was talking to the first trainer who got to him. But he was unconscious when they got him to shore.

"It's virtually impossible for us to go completely underwater with the amount of gear we have on us," Fitts said. "Invariably, something still can happen."

McLaughlin died just after midnight Wednesday morning.

"I'm angry that I've lost one of my best commanders and one of my good friends," said Ocean Shores Fire Chief Jim Hodges. "But it's not an anger at the Surf Rescue Team, it's an anger at my own helplessness in this situation."

It's the second death for the team. Eight years ago, team founder Lt. Jim Davis died in a surf rescue operation. Ironically, it was Rob McLaughlin who was the first to try to save him. He spoke with us back then.

McLaughlin in 1998 said, "Couple times along the way, we did have pulses back. But we were unable to sustain it."

So he knew the danger, yet Rob McLaughlin wanted to part of it.

"Rob was fireman all the way," Hodges said. "He lived it, he ate it, he breathed it and unfortunately he died it, but he died doing what he loved doing and that was preparing himself to save and give to other people."

A memorial fund for his wife and three children has been set up at Twin Counties Credit Union in Rob McLaughlin's name. They can be reached at 1-800-258-3115.

Fire fighters from all over the region are expected to come to Ocean Shores for the memorial March 29 at 2 p.m. at the Ocean Shores Convention Center.

Investigators still don't know if he drowned or perhaps had some medical condition go wrong.

### **Washington Firefighter Injured in Training Exercise**

<http://cms.firehouse.com/content/article/article.jsp?sectionId=39&id=48287>  
03-22-2006 PAULA HORTON *Courtesy of [The Daily World](#)*

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**Capt. Rob McLaughlin**  
**Courtesy of the Ocean Shores Fire and**  
**Emergency Care Department**

Begley was able to get back on the watercraft, but McLaughlin became separated. Police Sgt. Paul Luck, a senior team member and instructor, was about 50 yards away on his own personal watercraft and attempted to pick up McLaughlin. Breaking surf conditions prevented Luck from getting to McLaughlin right away.

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## **Captain Rob McLaughlin - Ocean Shores(WA) Fire & Emergency Care Dept**

<http://boards.ancestry.com/topics.obits/50516/mb.ashx>

03-27-2006

Captain Rob McLaughlin - Ocean Shores(WA) Fire & Emergency Care Dept.  
Funeral Services Set for Washington Firefighter  
Courtesy of the Ocean Shores Fire and Emergency Care Department

### **Capt. Rob McLaughlin**

Funeral services for a fallen firefighter/paramedic from Washington will be held at 2 p.m. Wednesday at the Ocean Shores Convention Center.

Capt. Rob McLaughlin, 40, died last week of injuries suffered during a water training exercise with the Ocean Shores Fire and Emergency Care Department.

The untimely death has left his colleagues stunned, and searching for answers, said Matt Krick, also a firefighter/paramedic.

"We're devastated. With only nine career and 25-28 volunteers, we're very close-knit..."

McLaughlin, the father of three, was stricken after being dumped into the ocean when a personal water craft overturned. He was a passenger on the vessel, operated by a fellow firefighter.

There were no signs of injuries, and an autopsy will determine if McLaughlin suffered a medical condition.

"It was a freak accident," Krick said Wednesday afternoon. "It was no one's fault. It just happened..."

McLaughlin was known statewide for his training expertise, and enjoyed sharing his skills with other firefighters. "He was just a super guy. He was our B shift captain..."

But, he meant so much more to many in the Ocean Shores area, Krick said. "He was our hunting and fishing buddy..."

Funeral arrangements are incomplete.

### **Robert E. McLaughlin** **September 16, 1965 ~ March 22, 2006**

It is with deep regret and great sadness that the City of Ocean Shores Fire Department and IAFF Local 2109 announce the death of Captain Robert E. McLaughlin. Captain McLaughlin is survived by his wife, Christine, two daughters, Christa and Katalin, and son, Killian.

Robert died on Wednesday, March 22, 2006 from drowning during a water

training exercise on Monday, March 20, 2006. Robert began his service in Ocean Shores as a volunteer in 1991, was hired full time in 1996 and promoted to Captain in 2000. He was very active in the Ocean Shores Surf Rescue Team and served as President of IAFF Local 2109 at the time of his death.

### **Memorial Fund**

Donations can be made to: Rob McLaughlin Memorial Fund,  
Twin County Credit Union, PO Box 718, Olympia, WA 98507-0718



### **Robert E. McLaughlin**

<http://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighter/robert-e-mclaughlin/>

**Captain**  
**Ocean Shores Fire Department**  
**Washington**  
**Age: 40**  
**Year of Death: 2006**



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#### ***Submitted by his Wife***

Robert McLaughlin died from injuries suffered during surf rescue training.

At the age of 16, he was a resident volunteer firefighter for the Silverdale Fire Department.

Rob served two years as a paid Firefighter/Paramedic and six years as Captain/Paramedic with Ocean Shores Fire Department. During his years of service, he was also an acting Fire Marshal, Assistant Chief, and Surf Rescue Team member.

Rob dedicated himself to making his department the best it could be. He was always working, even on his days off – looking for opportunities to train and improve upon the department. He strove to improve morale through participation in department activities, and he implemented training programs that had not previously been offered at our small department.

He was involved in the department's annual Halloween Carnival, Easter Egg Hunt, adopt-a-family at Christmas program, the North Beach High School Scholarship program, MDA Boot Drive, Harley Weekend, pancake breakfast, egg drop for Ocean Shores Elementary School, and the fire prevention program for local elementary schools.

Rob was very instrumental in starting the Grays Harbor County Firefighter 1 training academy, where he was a head instructor. He also taught search and rescue for the North Bend Fire Academy and was an instructor for the Grays Harbor paramedic program. He was named 2006 Grays Harbor Firefighter of the Year.

At the age of 18, he enlisted in the Army as a Recon/Sniper team leader.

He was a Babe Ruth Little League baseball coach. He loved to go hunting and fishing and spent as much time as he could outdoors. He also enjoyed restoring old jeeps, collecting firearms, target and skeet shooting, spending time with his family, camping, and traveling to different places in the US.

He is survived by his wife, Christine; daughters, Christa Hoff-McLaughlin and Katalin McLaughlin; and son, Robert Killian McLaughlin.

Rob saved countless lives and touched even more during his time with us. He had a skill and assurance on and off the job that will be difficult to imitate. His gentle heart, quick wit, and infectious grin will be missed.

Rob McLaughlin is missed deeply by his family, his fire family, and the community which he proudly served and to which he dedicated his life.

<http://www.wscff.org/Docs/McLaughlin%20Announcement.pdf>



Affiliated with: AFL-CIO  
International Association of Fire Fighters  
Washington State Labor Council

## Washington State Council of Fire Fighters

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### Fire Department Line-of-Duty Death



**Robert E. McLaughlin**

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Robert died on Wednesday, March 22, 2006 from drowning during a water training exercise on Monday, March 20, 2006. Robert began his service in Ocean Shores as a volunteer in 1991, was hired full time in 1996 and promoted to Captain in 2000. He was very active in the Ocean Shores Surf Rescue Team and served as President of IAFF Local 2109 at the time of death.

#### Memorial Service

**Wednesday, March 29, 2006 ~ 2:00 p.m.**

Ocean Shores Convention Center

120 W. Chance A La Mere Avenue, Ocean Shores, WA 98569

**Questions can be directed to the Public Information Officer at 360-580-3586**

*A private graveside service for family members and invited guests only will follow.*

#### Procession

Assembly point will be at the Quinault Beach Resort & Casino at 12:00 p.m.

If you wish to participate in the apparatus procession, please contact:

Dave Golding, (360) 581-6529 or email [iaff2639@techline.com](mailto:iaff2639@techline.com)

#### Memorial Fund

Donations can be made to: Rob McLaughlin Memorial Fund,

Twin County Credit Union, PO Box 718, Olympia, WA 98507-0718

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# **Career Captain Dies from Complications of a Drowning Incident due to a Combination of Exhaustion, Hypothermia and Carbon Monoxide Poisoning During Surf Rescue Training - Washington**

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fire/reports/face200614.html>



***Death in the Line of Duty...A summary of a NIOSH fire fighter fatality investigation***

**F2006-14 Date Released: December 17, 2007**

## **SUMMARY**

On March 22, 2006, a 40-year-old male career Captain (victim) died from complications of a drowning incident that occurred two days prior. The victim was in a training class with another student to become certified on a personal watercraft/waverunner (PWC) to conduct surf rescue operations for his jurisdiction. While the victim participated in training evolutions as a passenger on the back of the PWC, he fell off and reboarded numerous times while the engine was running. After a wave knocked both trainees from the PWC, the victim reported that he was too tired to re-board and seemed confused. The instructor attempted to drag the Captain into shore using an 18-inch tow strap attached to the rear of the PWC, but this was very difficult due to the surf conditions and the engine's water propulsion hitting the victim's upper body. After numerous attempts to hang on, the Captain became lost in the surf. A few minutes later, the instructor found the Captain and swam him to shore. The victim was retrieved from the surf and advanced life-saving efforts were initiated until the ambulance arrived on the scene and transported him to a local hospital. He was airlifted to a regional medical center where he died two days later from the injuries received during the incident. NIOSH investigators consider the drowning episode to have been triggered by a combination of exhaustion, hypothermia [rectal temperature less than 95.7° Fahrenheit (F)], and carbon monoxide poisoning (carboxyhemoglobin level estimated to be 20%). To minimize the risk of similar occurrences, fire departments, police departments, and/or agencies with surf rescue teams should:

- **ensure that PWC are never boarded by an operator or a passenger while the engine is running**
- **enhance current standard operating procedures to include requirements for rescue boards on all PWC during emergency responses and training**

- **enhance current standard operating procedures to include requirements for issued personal protective equipment (PPE)**
- **enhance current standard operating procedures for training operations to duplicate the same level of response as an actual emergency**
- **provide an emergency medical services unit at all training sessions**
- **consider conducting a job analysis of surf rescue to determine its fitness and strength requirements**

Additionally, manufacturers should:

- **assess the significance of carbon monoxide exposures and carbon monoxide poisoning among operators of PWC during simulated rescue operations.**

## INTRODUCTION

On March 22, 2006, a 40-year-old male career Captain (victim) died from complications sustained after a drowning incident. On March 23, 2006, the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) notified the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) of the fatality. On June 11-14, 2006, a Safety and Occupational Health Specialist from the NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program investigated the incident. Meetings were held with the U.S. Coast Guard, police department officials responsible for the training, fire department officials, and the city attorney. Interviews were conducted with the fire and police department officers directly involved in the incident. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of the County's Sheriff Office, the State Medical Examiner's Office, and the dry suit manufacturer who established the training protocol for area surf rescue teams. The NIOSH investigator reviewed the fire department's report, the police department's report, the county sheriff's report, the police department's standard operating procedures (SOPs), the instructor's and trainees' training records, the dispatch log for the incident, and the ambulance, emergency department, and hospital records of this incident. The PWC was visually inspected and photographed.

### **Surf Rescue Team and Response Protocol**

The Surf Rescue Team is operated by the local police department and staffed by its police and local career fire department members. The team is dispatched to any water event such as a capsized boat, a downed aircraft, or a swimmer in trouble. The department serves a population of approximately 6,000 residents in a geographic area of about 60 square miles.

## Training

The State of Washington does not require a license or specialized training for surf rescue members. However, the police department requires the following for Operators and Instructors, respectively.

Operators:

- minimum swim qualification,
- rescue swimmer certifications,
- CPR and first aid certifications, and
- recommendation by the Surf Rescue Team leader.

Instructors:

- be an "Operator" for more than six months,
- logged over 50 hours on the PWC,
- attend the National Marine Rescue Academy for PWC course or equivalent.

## Personal Watercraft (PWC)

The PWC used by the instructor was a 2000, class A inboard boat with jet propulsion. It was 124 inches in length and weighed 605 pounds. It was a 2-stroke gasoline engine with 718cc displacement. The exhaust fumes exited near the water line at the rear of the craft ([Photo 1](#)).

The PWC had an 18 inch towing strap looped off the back seat ([Photo 2](#)).



**Photo 1. Location of Exhaust**



**Photo 2. Towing Strap**

### **Personal Protective Equipment**

The victim was wearing a full body dry-suit with a poly-propolyene jump suit underneath, a polyolefin and Lycra® combination hood, a helmet, a strobe, a mask, a snorkel, a personal flotation device, and a pair of thin non-insulated gloves that he reportedly purchased to improve dexterity ([Photo 3](#)). The dry-suit provided a protective and abrasion resistant shell while the undergarment provided thermal protection. These garments were part of a system that provides substantial protection against the elements as long as it is not compromised. The hood and gloves that the victim was wearing were not waterproof and would have provided minimal thermal protection in this windy environment on the ocean, and possibly none once they became wet.



**Photo 3. Gloves worn by victim during incident**

### **Weather/Sea Conditions**

The conditions were clear and sunny with the temperature averaging 62° F. The water temperature was approximately 47° F with winds averaging about 15 miles per hour and a wind chill of approximately 32° F.<sup>1</sup>

## **INVESTIGATION**

On March 20, 2006, a 40-year-old male career Captain (victim) participated in a training session on surf rescue operations using a PWC in the ocean. The scheduled four hour session involved an instructor and two fire fighters (the victim and another fire fighter). The goal was to demonstrate proficiency at operating a PWC in surf conditions. Several weeks prior to this event, the instructor and these two fire fighters practiced in a nearby fresh water lake which was considered a less rigorous and less hazardous environment.

The trainees spent the first two hours of the session conducting maneuverability drills with their individual PWC through the breakers as the instructor oversaw the drills while operating his PWC. After this, they rested on the beach for about 30 minutes, drank some water, but did not consume any food. The second half of the session was devoted to each trainee operating a PWC with a passenger (the other trainee) aboard which is a more difficult task. The victim was the first to drive the PWC with the other trainee as a passenger. The victim drove through the surf until approximately ¼ mile offshore and then completed several drills without incident (e.g. neither the driver nor the passenger fell off the PWC). At approximately

1400 hours, the two trainees returned to shore to switch positions in thigh-deep water. When they returned to the open surf, the other fire fighter was driving and the victim was the passenger. As the driver was negotiating the rough surf, the victim fell off the PWC several times. Given the rough surf conditions, re-boarding the PWC as a passenger was an extremely difficult task. Note: Boarding a PWC from the water is difficult, even in calm (e.g. non-surf) conditions. To board a PWC as a passenger from the water, is even more difficult. Once the driver is seated, the passenger approaches the back of the PWC and pulls the craft down while lifting his/her body out of the water. This is typically done with the passenger's hands on both of the side floor boards. In one fluid motion, the passenger raises his/her knees to the side floor boards as his/her hands leave the side floor boards to grab the seat handle. The passenger then quickly pull him/herself up onto the seat. During this procedure, both the driver and passenger must be perfectly balanced so the PWC doesn't tip over. Once the passenger is aboard, the driver must counter-balance the passenger's weight, and be prepared to start the craft and accelerate the moment the passenger is seated. It is also important to note that the exhaust exits underneath the PWC at the rear floor boards. Passengers preparing to re-board from the water could be exposed to exhaust fumes if the craft is running.

Each time the victim fell off the PWC and into the cold water, he seemed to take longer and have more trouble re-boarding. The victim had just successfully re-boarded when a wave knocked both trainees off the PWC. The instructor was within yards of the trainees when they capsized and immediately went to render assistance on his PWC. The instructor yelled to both trainees to check their conditions. The driver gave a hand signal to communicate he was alright. The victim reported that he was too tired to re-board. The instructor threw the victim a buoyancy ring to clip around himself, but the victim could not manipulate the connection and began flailing his arms.

The instructor immediately realized the gravity of the situation and decided to tow the victim the ¼-mile to shore. He checked on the driver and saw him swimming to shore after being separated from the PWC. The instructor attempted to tow the victim back to shore using an 18-inch tow strap attached to the back seat of his PWC. The victim hooked his elbow into a loop on the tow strap and tried to keep his head above the water. During this towing process, the victim's face was very close (inches) from the rear floor boards where the engine exhaust exits the PWC.

Due to his exhausted state and the force of the jet propulsion hitting his upper body, the victim had difficulty holding onto the strap. The instructor had to circle around several times to reattach the victim to the strap. Approximately 100 yards from shore the victim became detached from the strap for the last time, remained face down, and was lost in the surf for a few minutes. The instructor found him and swam him into shallow water where he was assisted by the Safety Officer who was positioned on the shore.

## RESUSCITATION and TREATMENT

Once on shore at 1515 hours, an ambulance was requested by the Safety Officer and the victim was unresponsive with seawater in his mouth. He had a pulse but no spontaneous respirations. Two rescue breaths were given, followed by mouth to mouth rescue breathing, but the victim slipped into cardiac arrest. Cycles of chest compressions and ventilations were provided according to the 2005 American Heart Association Guidelines for Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and Emergency Cardiovascular Care. No automated external defibrillators (AED) were available on-scene. Ambulance personnel arrived six minutes later (1521 hours), and initiated advanced life support which included intubation (breathing tube placed into the victim's airway), and starting two intravenous lines through which medications were administered. At 1524 hours the ambulance departed for the local emergency department. Approximately 9 minutes en-route, the victim regained a heart rhythm which was able to maintain a blood pressure of 97/50 mm Hg. The ambulance arrived at the emergency department at 1555 hours ([See Appendix for timeline](#)).

In the emergency department the victim was unresponsive, with a heart rate of 115 beats per minute, a blood pressure of 107/30 mm Hg, and no spontaneous respirations. His rectal temperature was 95.7° F after being treated and warmed in the ambulance for 31 minutes. His first arterial blood gas was taken at 1605 hours which showed extreme acidosis (pH=6.6, pO<sub>2</sub>=138, pCO<sub>2</sub>=62, and a bicarbonate of 6) consistent with a respiratory arrest. Other blood work was collected at 1610 hours and 1850 hours. A chest X-ray showed increased densities in his right lower lobe and right middle lobe (consistent with aspiration pneumonia and/or early adult respiratory distress syndrome). He was placed on a ventilator (breathing machine), given broad spectrum antibiotics for a possible pneumonia, and admitted to the intensive care unit with a diagnosis of "near-drowning".

In the intensive care unit the victim's lungs were not able to adequately oxygenate his blood, despite being on 100% oxygen through the ventilator. In addition, his blood pressure was

beginning to fall, needing intravenous medication. Due to the victim's deteriorating clinical condition, he was transferred via air ambulance to a regional medical center. He was treated at that center for about 1 day, but he never regained consciousness. His cardiopulmonary status continued to deteriorate and he died at 0019 hours on March 22, 2006.

## AUTOPSY

An autopsy was performed by the Associate Medical Examiner in the County Medical Examiner's office. Significant findings included:

- 5 foot 10 inches body weighing 232 pounds (body mass index of 33.3 which is considered obese.<sup>2</sup>)
- Normal heart with minimal atherosclerosis in the coronary arteries
- No evidence of a pulmonary embolus
- Microscopic finding of ischemic necrosis [cell death due to lack of oxygen] in three critical areas of the brain (cerebrum, cerebellum, hippocampus)
- Negative blood screen for opiates, cocaine, amphetamines, PCP, marijuana, methadone, propoxyphene, benzodiazepines, barbiturates, and tricyclic antidepressants
- Carboxyhemoglobin (COHb) level of 10% (normal < 1%).<sup>3</sup> This test was run on about 1 milliliter of whole blood collected in a 5 milliliter purple top tube on 3/20/06. We do not know the precise time this blood sample was taken or the storage conditions (refrigerated or frozen) from 3/20/06 until 3/27/06 when it arrived in the County Medical Examiner's office. Upon arrival in the County Medical Examiner's office it was kept refrigerated until the initial testing (drug screen mentioned above) was completed on 3/27/06 and then transferred to a storage freezer. On 5/1/06, the Associate Medical Examiner requested COHb testing, so the sample was thawed and analyzed for COHb using a CO-oximeter.

The Associate Medical Examiner considered the cause of death to be "hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy [brain damage due to lack of oxygen] and adult respiratory distress syndrome due to drowning."

## DISCUSSION

NIOSH investigators believe three factors contributed to this drowning incident: exhaustion, hypothermia, and carbon monoxide poisoning.

## EXHAUSTION

Attempting to board a PWC in the open surf as a driver is a strenuous task. Attempting to re-board a PWC in the open surf as a passenger is even more difficult, especially if the passenger is wearing cold water survival gear. Passenger re-boarding requires an incredible amount of strength, balance, and coordination with the driver. The victim had been involved in this physically demanding certification training for about three hours, the last 30 minutes as a passenger with numerous re-boarding episodes. The victim appeared fatigued, exhausted, and stated he was "too tired to re-board". The surf rescue team requires numerous Operator and Instructor qualifications (see above Training section), but none address the applicant's physical fitness to perform the essential tasks of surf rescue. Although the victim was obese (BMI of 33.3), obesity, by itself, does not predict an applicant's fitness (strength and aerobic capacity).

## HYPOTHERMIA

In the emergency department the victim had a rectal temperature of 95.7° F [35.4° Celsius (C)]. Rectal temperature is a good measure of core body temperature. This reading was taken approximately 31 minutes after being treated, and warmed, in the ambulance. Therefore, his core body temperature was probably below 95.7° F when he entered the ambulance. Hypothermia is defined as the fall in core body temperature below 95° F. It can be classified as mild (>93.2° F), moderate (86° F -93.2° F), and severe (<86°F), although the temperature criteria for each classification varies somewhat by author. <sup>4-6</sup>The clinical effects of mild hypothermia include symptoms of cold, exhaustion, numbness and signs of shivering, decreased hand coordination, and mild impairment of judgement/responsiveness. <sup>6,7</sup> With the exception of shivering, the fire fighter had all of these signs and symptoms while trying to re-board the PWC.

Prior to this incident the Fire department issued the trainees a neoprene body suit including gloves to provide protection from the cold water. The gloves issued by the fire department were three millimeters thick which reduced hand and finger dexterity. To overcome this dexterity problem, the victim used other gloves he had purchased that provided limited thermal protection. After falling from the craft into the cold water, the victim's hands would have become very cold. His cold hands probably impaired his ability to board the PWC, hold on to his training partner, clip himself onto the buoyancy ring, and hold onto the PWC's towing strap. In addition, the victim's face was also exposed to the cold water without

insulation. These two sources, hands and face, immersed in cold water were likely responsible for the victim's mild hypothermia.

Shortly after being pulled from the water, the victim suffered a cardiac arrest. Although severe hypothermia is known to cause cardiac arrest, the victim's probable mild hypothermia, by itself, likely did not directly cause his cardiac arrest. [6.7](#)

## CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless gas produced when fuels such as gasoline are burned. The PWC's engine exhausted in the rear of the craft near the water line. When attempting to reboard the craft and during efforts to drag him into shore, the victim's head would have been in the direct path of the exhaust. As mentioned previously, attempting to board a PWC in the open surf is an extremely demanding task, especially while wearing cold water survival gear. This would produce a fast and deep breathing, factors that would increase his CO exposure.<sup>9</sup>

When inhaled, CO crosses the alveolar (lung) membrane and binds to hemoglobin forming COHb. The COHb alters the shape of the hemoglobin molecule which reduces the availability of oxygen to other tissues causing hypoxia. CO also disrupts the intercellular use of oxygen (oxydative phosphorylation) by binding to intracellular enzymes (cytochrome c oxidase).<sup>10</sup> The brain and the heart are the organs most vulnerable to hypoxia.

Symptoms/signs associated with CO poisoning include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, confusion, fast heart rate and shortness of breath.<sup>9</sup> According to the training instructor, the victim acted in a confused or disoriented manner during the later efforts to reboard the PWC.

COHb levels in the blood are used to assess CO exposure and CO poisoning. As a marker of CO poisoning, it should be noted that COHb levels do not correlate well with clinical findings, and that profound unconsciousness has been reported with levels less than 20%.<sup>11,12</sup> Another potential source of CO exposure includes the victim's habit of smoking up to five cigars a day. COHb levels among primary cigar smokers (those who never inhaled cigarettes) are generally less than 5%, while secondary cigar smokers (cigarette smokers switching to cigars) have reported COHb levels as high as 13%, presumably due to the inhalation of the cigar smoke.<sup>3,13-15</sup> It is not known if the victim inhaled his cigar smoke, nor when his last cigar was smoked. It is known that once the training started (about 1000 hours), the victim did not complain of any symptoms or show any signs of CO poisoning.

The possibility of CO poisoning was not considered during efforts to resuscitate the victim. However, the Associate Medical Examiner was aware of drowning deaths associated with CO poisoning involving recreational boats.<sup>16-18</sup> On May 1, 2006 he requested the State Toxicology Laboratory test the Captain's COHb level. The COHb was elevated (10%), but not at a level considered dangerous. However, the Captain's resuscitation efforts included intubation and administration of 100% oxygen; measures that speed the elimination of COHb.<sup>10,19</sup> He was intubated and given 100% oxygen for approximately 47 minutes prior to blood being drawn at the local hospital (1610 hours according to the local hospital's laboratory report). Assuming the blood that was tested for COHb was from this blood collection, his corrected COHb would have been approximately 20%.<sup>10</sup> If, however, the blood that was tested for COHb was actually from his last blood draw at the local hospital (1850 hours), his COHb level would have been significantly higher (e.g. >60%). Unfortunately, the tube containing the victim's blood from the initial hospitalization only had the date, not the time that the blood was drawn. Other factors that can lower COHb levels include inadequate or prolonged storage of blood samples.<sup>20-22</sup> As mentioned earlier, storage conditions of the blood sample were not available after it was drawn on 3/20/06 until when it arrived in the County Medical Examiner's office on March 27, 2006.

## RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSIONS

**Recommendation #1: Fire departments, police departments, and/or agencies with surf rescue teams should ensure that PWC are never boarded by an operator or a passenger while the engine is running.**

Discussion: The police department's SOPs include the manufacturer's operating instructions for the PWC. With a properly attached "kill switch" the engine is automatically shut off when the operator falls off of the PWC. The instructions state that the craft should not be started until the driver and passenger are properly seated.<sup>23</sup> In this incident, the victim was riding as a passenger and fell off of the craft numerous times. The PWC was running each time while the victim attempted to board it.

**Recommendation #2: Fire departments, police departments, and/or agencies with surf rescue teams should enhance current standard operating procedures to include requirements for rescue boards on all PWC during emergency responses and training.**

Discussion: The department conducting the training had a PWC equipped with a rescue board which is attached to the back of the PWC to assist with transporting a victim or swimmer ([Photo 4](#)). The PWC that had this piece of safety equipment was not used during this training session. It could have assisted in transporting the victim to shore safely. The rescue board reduces the physical effort of holding onto the craft and the drag from being towed through the water. It also elevates the rescuer's head and acts as a shield from the exhaust.



**Photo 4. Rescue Board**

**Recommendation #3 : Fire departments, police departments, and/or agencies with surf rescue teams should enhance current standard operating procedures to include requirements for issued personal protective equipment (PPE).**

Discussion: Providing and using safety equipment that is compliant with all applicable standards will not necessarily guarantee fire fighter safety; however, injuries and fatalities can be minimized if protective clothing and equipment are used properly.<sup>24</sup>

In this incident the fire fighters who were taking the training were wearing gloves that were not issued to them. The gloves that were issued to them were made from neoprene that was 3mm thick to provide protection from the cold ([Photo 5](#)). The gloves that the fire fighters were wearing to increase dexterity, provided limited thermal protection. Also, the hood that was issued to the surf rescue team provided little thermal protection once it became wet. After

falling from the craft and being exposed to the cold water, the victim's ability to board, operate, and hold on to a partner while attempting the exercises could have been restricted. Reduced thermal protection could have also affected the victim's ability to attach a personal flotation device or hold on to the towing strap. A clear and effective policy addressing the use of issued PPE and protective clothing is the cornerstone to ensure that fire fighters will understand the importance of using this vital equipment on a routine basis, even in training.



**Photo 5. Gloves issued to surf rescue members**

**Recommendation #4: Fire departments, police departments, and/or agencies with surf rescue teams should enhance current standard operating procedures for training operations to duplicate the same level of response as an actual emergency.**

Discussion: The department's SOPs indicate that any call of a swimmer in trouble, a capsized boat, a downed aircraft, etc., requires the Surf Rescue Team to activate.<sup>23</sup> A procedure included in this deployment is to notify the U.S. Coast Guard and request that they respond with a helicopter and a boat. The SOPs also state that a two person configuration on the PWC consisting of an operator and a rescue swimmer is preferred for rescue operations. It states that it allows for the operator to concentrate on his PWC and the rescue swimmer to focus on locating, stabilizing, and recovering the victim.<sup>23</sup>

The environment does not change between training and actual rescue operations. They are both potentially dangerous and should be conducted with the same safety procedures. Surf rescue training could possibly be coordinated with the U.S. Coast Guard's training to ensure that the same resources are available if needed. If not, then the U.S. Coast Guard could be notified that the training is being conducted in case an emergency situation should arise. Training evolutions in a hazardous environment should include adequate instructors and/or safety personnel to function if an incident should occur. In this incident, the instructor was alone on his PWC without a rescue board and was faced with two possible victims. The training took place approximately ¼-mile from shore. The instructor did not have any form of communication to the one safety person on shore.

**Recommendation #5: Fire departments, police departments, and/or agencies with surf rescue teams should provide an emergency medical services (EMS) unit at all training sessions.**

Discussion: A transport-capable EMS unit should be considered at all incidents and fireground training. NFPA 1500, Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program,<sup>24</sup> and NFPA 1561, Standard on Emergency Services Incident Management System,<sup>25</sup> require that a transport-capable EMS unit be standing by at special operations. The department's SOPs state that an ambulance should be dispatched to all water rescue incidents. In this incident, no EMS units or personnel were on the scene during the training.

**Recommendation #6: Fire departments, police departments, and/or agencies with surf rescue teams should consider conducting a job analysis of surf rescue to determine its fitness and strength requirements.**

Discussion: As mentioned previously, attempting to re-board a PWC in the open surf as a driver, and especially as a passenger, is physically strenuous. Although the surf rescue team requires numerous Operator and Instructor qualifications ([see above Training section](#)), none address the applicant's physical ability to perform surf rescue. Currently the fire department ensures that fire fighters can perform the essential job tasks of structural fire fighting by following the recommendations in NFPA 1582 and 1500.<sup>24, 26</sup> However, it is unclear if these tests are adequate for surf rescue given the additional strength and coordination needed for this assignment. Therefore, the fire department should consider a job analysis of surf rescue to determine its fitness and strength requirements. Then, as required by NFPA 1500, the fire

department can perform these updated annual fitness assessments to ensure the applicants and current personnel are physically capable of performing the task in a safe manner.

**Recommendation #7: Manufacturers should assess the significance of carbon monoxide exposures and carbon monoxide poisoning among operators of PWC during simulated rescue operations.**

Discussion: With a corrected COHb level of 20%, the victim had significant CO exposure and CO poisoning. We cannot determine whether CO poisoning, by itself, was responsible for the drowning, however it was a contributing factor.

From 1990 to 2004, there were approximately 540 CO poisonings associated with exhaust from gasoline powered marine engines on recreational boats; 250 poisonings occurred on non-houseboats (other types of recreational boats).<sup>27,28</sup> NIOSH has conducted two studies documenting CO exposures with PWC use. Both studies were conducted while the PWC were stationary. The first study measured CO exposures at center rear of the deck and found levels of 500 ppm using detector tubes and levels ranging from 126 to 2,600 for evacuated containers.<sup>29</sup> The second study measured CO levels 8 and 10 feet behind the PWC and reported mean CO levels of 2 and 3 parts per million (ppm) with peaks of 15-17 ppm.<sup>30</sup> The NIOSH recommended exposure limit for occupational exposures to CO gas in air is 35 ppm for a full shift time-weighted average exposure, and a ceiling limit of 200 ppm, which should never be exceeded.<sup>31</sup> Additional study is needed to determine CO levels at various PWC locations for the driver, passengers, and during use of the towing strap and the rescue board under various environmental conditions.

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## Appendix: Timeline.

### **3/20/06**

- 1000 hours:
  - Instructor and two trainees arrive at beach
- 1030 - 1230 hours:
  - Individual maneuvers through surf
- 1300 -1500 hours:
  - Tandem maneuvers through surf
- 1515 hours:
  - Victim pulled onto beach

- Ambulance requested from dispatch
- Mouth to mouth resuscitation began
- Pulse stopped and chest compressions added
- 1521 hours:
  - Ambulance arrived on-scene
- 1522 hours:
  - Victim intubated and bagged with 100% oxygen
- 1523 hours:
  - Intravenous lines started
  - Advanced life support medications administered
- 1524 hours:
  - Ambulance departs beach enroute to the local hospital's emergency department (ED)
- 1533 hours:
  - Victim regains a pulse and blood pressure of 97/50 mm Hg
- 1555 hours:
  - Ambulance arrives at the hospital ED
- 1558 hours:
  - ED Initial Evaluation: Unresponsive, no spontaneous respirations.
  - Rectal Temperature of 95.7° F, Pulse 115, BP 107/30,
  - Placed on ventilator
- 2300 hours:
  - Victim transferred via air ambulance to regional Medical Center

### **3/22/06**

- 0019 hours:
  - Victim dies and resuscitation efforts are discontinued

### **3/23/06**

- 0900 hours:
  - Autopsy performed by County's Medical Examiner's Office

### **3/27/06**

- No time:
  - State Toxicology Laboratory receives blood and serum sample from the local hospital (original admission from 3/20/06)

**3/31/06**

- State Toxicology Lab completed serum drug screen

**5/01/06**

- County Medical Examiner's officer requests the State Toxicology Lab analyze the blood sample for carboxyhemoglobin.

**5/8/06**

- Supplemental Toxicology Lab report printed

**5/12/06**

- Associate Medical Examiner completed and signs the autopsy report

## INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

This incident was investigated by Jay Tarley a Safety and Occupational Health Specialist, Division of Safety Research, NIOSH and Thomas Hales, MD, MPH. Dr Hales provided medical consultation and co-authored the report. This page was last updated on 01/10/08.

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### **McLaughlin v. City of Ocean Shores**

<http://www.stritmatter.com/case/mclaughlin-v-city-of-ocean-shores/>  
Practice Area(s): [Diving Accidents / Aquatic Injuries](#) [Government Liability](#) [Wrongful Death](#)

(December 2008). A \$1,500,000 settlement for the family of an Ocean Shores Fire Department Captain who died as a result of injuries from drowning during a Surf Rescue Team training on personal watercraft (PWC).

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## **Surf rescue program hits the cutting room floor in Ocean Shores**

<http://thedailyworld.com/sections/news/local/surf-rescue-program-hits-cutting-room-floor-ocean-shores.html>

January 23, 2013 By Angelo Bruscas The Daily World

The decision to cut city funding from the Ocean Shores Surf Rescue team has created a wave of worry that was just beginning to surface last week.

Mayor Crystal Dingler disclosed her decision to cut the Surf Rescue funding during the City Council study session and later at the City Council's regular meeting, both on Jan. 14, more than two weeks after the last-minute budget decision.

"It was really with a heavy heart that we de-activated the Surf Rescue group," Dingler said. "The buck stops here. It was a tough decision."

The move eliminated \$52,500 in funding for the city's 10-person team, which now is in the process of being deactivated.

Dingler said the money was part of \$147,000 that had to be trimmed from an already lean but balanced budget by a directive to cut an additional 2.5 percent from all departments. There was no other choice, the mayor said, except to trim positions from the Emergency Medical Services and Police staff.

"I have people already working part time who should have full-time jobs and have full-time work and are just having to decide what they can do," Dingler said.

She added that the Surf Rescue cuts seemed the "lesser of two evils" in comparing it to further employee cuts.

### **'ESSENTIAL SERVICE'**

Holly Plackett, the former Chamber of Commerce co-director, questioned the move at last week's council sessions.

"This is an essential city service," she said, urging the council to restore the money from a special council fund. Plackett and her husband Mark recently headed an economic development committee formed by the mayor. The committee's report will soon be rolled out before the city Planning Commission. Having a trained Surf Rescue team, Plackett contends, provides security for tourists and others who come to use the Ocean Shores beaches.

"We really affirm that tourism is our No. 1 industry here, and we cannot successfully market ourselves as a family destination without that kind of

back-up safety," Plackett said in an interview the day after the council addressed the issue, but took no action to restore the money.

Plackett said citizens only became aware the money had been cut after they saw a cover letter from Dingler that accompanied the final budget for 2013.

An attempt by Councilman John Lynn to restore the money by using the council's discretionary fund was voted down, largely because it was seen as a vote to spend money out of reserves after members had just approved the new EMS utility fee, which was said to be a way to build back the city's reserve fund.

City Finance Director Steve Ensley told the council it did have the authority to spend the money, but it would require a standing document to amend the 2013 budget.

"You would start spending the money that you said we were not going to spend," Ensley told the council before the proposal was voted down 5-1, with only Lynn voting for it.

Councilman Randy Scott said he was in favor of more thorough review process, including taking formal public comment, followed by council action.

"I think it's extremely important to get it back in," Lynn said.

"This is a very important subject to the community," he added.

Councilman Ed Engel, who has questioned the Surf Rescue funding in the past said he, too, would rather let more citizens have an opportunity to address the issue. But his amendment to move the issue until the next council agenda failed for lack of a second at the last council meeting. Plackett said the "onus right now is on the City Council to fund that."

When the mayor surveyed the local population last summer about what was important in Ocean Shores, Plackett noted, emergency medical services was the No. 1 issue.

"This is really an extension of EMS," she said of Surf Rescue.

## **EVENT CONCERN**

Lynda Miller, president of Ocean Shores ACT (Action Committee for Tourism), sounded a dire plea to restore the funds. ACT organizes the annual Sand and Sawdust Festival in June and the Labor Day Picnic in September.

Losing the Surf Rescue team renders the beach unsafe, Miller told the council. "Do you think that people will want to visit a beach town when you cannot safely use the beach?" Miller asked. "Will they want to build or buy in

a beach community without a safe beach? This town has had a reputation for safety for residents or visitors. That reputation will be gone with the first fatality.”

That reputation has been built up, she continued, with 24 years of experience provided by the local Surf Rescue team and its members, some of whom lost their lives in rescues. Miller noted she would be meeting with the event attorney and sponsor about the Surf Rescue issue.

“As the event coordinator for an event that sees thousands of people on the beach, half under the age of 12, I am extremely worried about the legal, moral and ethical advisability of putting on such an event,” Miller said.

Plackett said the action to deactivate the team could easily be changed.

“We cannot make it unsafe to be on our beach in our beach community,” she said, contending the city can no longer promote itself as a “valued family vacation destination.”

“Surly, those of you on our council who are involved in a business here in Ocean Shores can see the negative results of this decision,” Plackett said.

## **RESCUE HISTORY**

The Ocean Shores Police Department Surf Rescue Team was founded in July 1989, with current Police Chief Mike Styner as one of its first trainees.

At that time, the only experienced help available was the Coast Guard at Westport. However, the Coast Guard’s response time to the beach at Ocean Shores was over half an hour, and the Coast Guard is not equipped for rescues in the surf extremely close to shore.

Since its formation, there have been 237 Surf Rescue calls for assistance, and 118 people have been rescued, with 15 drownings that included two members of the Surf Rescue team: Lt. Jim Davis in 1998 and Capt. Rob McLaughlin in 2006.

Over the years, the team has accepted the responsibility of protecting a 13-mile stretch of beach, the North jetty area at the south end of the city and the east side of the city, which includes a large portion of Grays Harbor. The team also has responded to fresh-water rescues within the city limits on its lakes and canal system.

As a result of the city budget move, Styner said he currently is in the process of deactivating the team, which includes putting up additional warning signs about rip currents and lack of lifeguards at all the Ocean Shores main beach approaches.

The chief worries that he will also have to "generate a policy that precludes my people from going into the water" in the event of a rescue, for safety reasons alone. "Not a moment of the day goes by where I don't think about this dilemma," Styner said in a meeting with Dingler to talk about the repercussions of losing Surf Rescue. Both Dingler and Styner said any move to restore funding now must come from the Council or the public.

Dingler noted the team was only deactivated, with the members still trained in rescues. "So it can be re-activated at any time," she said.

## **Budget cuts deactivate Ocean Shores rescue team**

<http://komonews.com/news/local/budget-cuts-deactivate-ocean-shores-rescue-team>

BY KEITH ELDRIDGE WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13TH 2013

OCEAN SHORES, Wash. -- A water rescue team that saves lives is about to go under. The mayor of Ocean Shores is deactivating the surf rescue team in a budget cut.



But one girl who was rescued by the team hopes they can be spared.

"I was just going for a swim and I went out too deep and I got caught by the riptide," said Lizzie Dambacher.

Dambacher was with her family near the jetty last summer when the lure of the water nearly killed her.

"The second I couldn't touch the ground, my first thoughts were 'I'm screwed,' because I knew I was in trouble," she said.

The riptide and heavy waves kept pulling her further from shore.

"I purposefully watched out for the waves so when they came over I would hold my breath and not suck in the water," she said.

Officer Chris Iversen of the Surf Rescue Team saw she was in trouble, and as she managed to get close to shore, helped pull her out.

But the mayor of Ocean Shores just announced the surf rescue team is being deactivated -- the \$50,000 yearly cost in overtime and hazard pay is too much in a tight budget year.

The Dambacher's are dumbfounded

"I was really shocked, because that's crucial, absolutely crucial to have a

team like that in place," said Linda Dambacher, Lizzie's mother. "Those men and women are trained to do that job."

The team has a long history of saving lives, and it's dangerous work. Two team members have lost their lives in the surf, Capt. Rob McLaughlin and Lt. Jim Davis. Visitors to the beach now worry even more about its safety.

"Sure they might not save a guy every day or every couple of months," said Dave Jones. "But the one they do save or a group of them if they're out here is well worth it."

But should new money be found, there's a chance that the team could be put back into operation.

The police and firefighters on the team keep their jobs, just no more going into the water -- they'll have to wait for the Coast Guard.

There are suggestions that the county and state should help pay since the beach is a regional attraction.

## **Council members thwart mayor's plan to revive Surf Rescue**

<http://northcoastnews.com/news/council-members-thwart-mayor%E2%80%99s-plan-revive-surf-rescue.html>

April 27, 2013 By ANGELO BRUSCAS North Coast News

With City Councilman John Schroeder saying he wanted to "kill Surf and Rescue" completely in Ocean Shores after Mayor Crystal Dingler recently restored the service, four council members voted April 22 for a measure they believe will assure "that no taxpayer money be used to support" its reactivation.

"I just think this was a slap in every one of these council members' faces," said Councilman Ed Engel of the mayor's decision to start the hotly debated rescue program in time for summer without first informing the council.

Engel voted with Schroeder, Ginny Hill and Randy Scott in an attempt to counter the mayor's move to keep the Surf Rescue team operating as a stop-gap measure this year.

Scott said he believed the mayor had been given conditional approval to seek outside funding for Surf Rescue, not to restart it again.

"Grant money would be received first before activation," he said was how he perceived the process would operate.

Schroeder went so far as to propose charging potential drowning or accident victims \$5,000 for each time the Surf Rescue team is called out, suggesting that as a way of paying for the service.

"If they want Surf Rescue to come out and save somebody, charge them \$5,000," he said, declaring it was "no surprise to me" that the mayor tried to keep the service alive.

"My taxpayers tell me they don't want to pay for it. I don't want to pay for it. I'm not stupid enough to go out in that water," Schroeder added. "If someone is stupid enough to go out in that water, we should charge them for rescuing them."

Those four members joined in approving a motion made by Hill and seconded by Schroeder that said: "We as a council do not reactivate Surf Rescue unless the money is there 100 percent in grant or donations to support it; that no taxpayer money be used to support it."

Council members Dan Overton, John Lynn and Jackie Farra voted against the motion.

"It's just another way of saying, 'kill it,'" Dingley replied to the motion.

Dingley had announced three days earlier that she was restoring the team of Ocean Shores police and firefighters after outside funding sources had been found to go with city funds saved when Finance Director Steve Ensley chose not to retire. To start the year, the mayor had cut \$52,000 from the city's budget to operate the team in what she has said were overall cuts called for by a City Council directive.

"I had every expectation of receiving more funds for this," she told the council. "As we talked about timing on this, as I talked with the (Police) chief about this, we felt like we needed to get things started because we are already three weeks behind their normal activation schedule."

Dingley said she notified Police Chief Mike Styner that the service would again be put on hold and no further training would be done until she fully has all the funds secure from sources outside the city. Surf Rescue team members receive extra pay for participating on the mechanized rescue squad, which uses watercraft for ocean and fresh-water rescues.

Dingley noted the team members have to pass physicals and swimming tests just to be active, and the concern was to have the team ready for rescues as needed by the start of summer. The plan was to move forward with training and have the team ready by mid-May, Dingley said.

The Grays Harbor Community Foundation already has provided \$4,700 with another \$5,000 grant awarded last week, Dingley said.

The mayor vowed to continue to search for funds outside of the city budget to pay for the service and then intends to come back before the council to ask that it be resumed.

"The intent was certainly clear," she said of the 4-3 vote binding her not to use any city money in the effort.

When she tried to resume the service, Dingler told the council that the city found it can be reimbursed for recreational boating rescues from the state's safe boating program, funded from state vessel registration fees. It also may be reimbursed from the Coast Guard for responses to commercial boating accidents, Dingler suggested as more potential sources to help pay for the service.

"Between these things, I think we can work this out," Dingler told the council Monday night of her decision to move forward seeking outside funding sources.

The council members who opposed her effort, however, objected to Dingler's plan to also use \$14,000 in city funds once reserved to find a replacement for Ensley.

Any grant money, Dingler said, would be used to "repay ourselves and cover all of that."

Councilwoman Ginny Hill asked if the mayor had an end date and the cost for activation, and Dingler replied that she expected it would be until the end of the year.

The team was fully disbanded in February and the city put up warning signs at all beach entrances as a precaution under legal advisement before fully deactivating Surf Rescue, the only such program that doesn't rely on volunteers on the Washington coast. Long Beach has a volunteer rescue program, but is far closer to the main Coast Guard station in Astoria.

According to information presented at previous City Council sessions, the Surf Rescue team was founded in July 1989. Since its formation, there have been 237 Surf Rescue calls for assistance, and 118 people have been rescued, with 15 drownings that included two members of the Surf Rescue team: Lt. Jim Davis in 1998 and Capt. Rob McLaughlin in 2006.

Hill read questions she said were from resident Don Williams asking "what legally allows you to reactivate Surf Rescue when it was defunded?"

Dingler responded that "the choice was mine. Surf Rescue was not defunded by the council. The council told me to take X amount of money out (of the budget) as a percentage. I chose to deactivate Surf Rescue as part of that.

That's why I have been going out looking for grant money or any other money I could put together to do this."

Hill also questioned Dingler about McLaughlin's death and what lessons the city had learned from a report questioning the training conditions, fitness and equipment used by the team back then. But Dingler noted that Styner was not at the meeting and she deferred those questions, asking that they be made available in advance so she or staff could research the answers.

"I do know that changes were made after Capt. McLaughlin's death, but I wasn't in city government then, I don't know what those changes were," the mayor said.

Hill said she would like to observe the training and wanted assurances that any lingering safety or fitness issues be addressed "before this team ever goes in the water again. Because while we are looking at tourists getting killed, I really would not like to have my neighbor dead."

Hill also objected to using the money saved when Finance Director Ensley chose to remain with the city, and noted it was still taxpayer money.

"When I gave my opinion to you last week and said that you have got more time, it was not that you would come out the following Friday and reactivate. It was that you would take the time to 100 percent fund it, not with taxpayer money," Hill told the mayor. "I did not expect you to come out one week later and say you had reactivated the team. I expected you to come back one week later and say you had a \$10,000 grant."

Dingler responded that there was no time to wait: "If I'm able to get the funds, I don't know why it would bother you."

"If I got all the money together by September, what's the point?" she said. "Yes, I'm taking a chance on the funding sources by starting it now. But this is when we need them. We need them through the summer in particular."

"I think it's really important when we invite people to this city that we do our best to take care of them... We need to do everything we can to make sure that people and their children are safe here."

That caused Hill to reply: "We need to do everything we can to make sure our people live in an affordable city."

Dingler by the end of the week was determined to press forward and said she believes she will find the funds to support the program again.

"But I have to have all the money in hand until I can start it," she said.

## **Ocean Shores Deactivates Surf Rescue Team**

<http://www.kxro.com/ocean-shores-deactivates-surf-rescue-team/>

Feb 14, 2013

The Ocean Shores Surf Rescue Team will be officially deactivated on Saturday due to budget cuts.

The ten-man team is made up of six police officers and four firefighters. The cost per man averaged just over \$5,000 per year.

The Surf Rescue Team has been the first line of defense for water rescues near the shoreline. Calls often involved minors who get in trouble in the surf or boaters whose craft begins to capsize, although they responded to emergencies on the lakes as well.

In addition to the Surf Rescue Team for water emergencies, 911 always calls the Coast Guard. The Westport Coast Guard Station will respond, but are about forty-five minutes by boat from the main Ocean Shores beach approach. The Coast Guard is not capable of operating in the surf as their boats require about twenty feet of clearance from the sea bottom. The Coast Guard Air Station in Astoria, OR, is capable of water rescues, but is about thirty-five minutes by air from Ocean Shores when available.

In preparation for deactivation, the City has ordered additional signs to be posted at beach approaches and at fresh water access points. The signs warn that no lifeguard is on duty and that dangerous rip currents can harm the unwary.

Mayor Crystal Dingler says that the City will seek grants and donations to reactivate the team. The Mayor believes she can gather enough funding to keep the team working through the coming months when tourist activity is heaviest in Ocean Shores and the North Beach.

In the meantime, residents and visitors are urged to be especially careful in the water and to dial 911 immediately in the case of a water emergency.

## Young man presumed drowned in Ocean Shores surf

<http://northcoastnews.com/news/young-man-presumed-drowned-ocean-shores-surf.html>

July 27, 2014 North Coast News



Carol Schultz Photo: The Coast Guard searches for the missing young man from California off the Ocean Shores beaches.

An 18-year old California man is missing and presumed drowned in the ocean at Ocean Shores after an outing with a youth group Saturday evening.

At about 8 p.m. Saturday, eight young people from a youth group visiting from California were playing in the surf near the beach approach at W. Chance ala Mer.

The survivors described getting caught in a rip current and being pulled out through the surf and into

deep water, said a news release from Ocean Shores Police Sgt. David McManus. Five of the subjects were able to get to shore with little trouble, while two others barely made it back to shore and were treated by paramedics on scene for exhaustion and possible ingestion of sea water.

The missing 18-year old man, identified as Renelle Paul Alimoren from Pomona, Calif., reportedly helped two of his friends to shore before being swept out again by the rip current, the news release said.

He was last spotted in the surf at about 8:30 p.m., about half a mile south of where he first entered the water.

The Ocean Shores Police and Fire Departments responded and attempted to locate the missing man from the beach. The United States Coast Guard responded with a boat from Station Grays Harbor and a helicopter from Astoria. They searched the area for several hours, but were unable to locate the missing man.

McManus said Alimoren was credited with saving several lives after the group was wading fully dressed in the surf and described a situation in which they fell into a hole as the waves were coming in.

"They were in no way prepared to be out swimming, and he got caught by the rip after saving a couple of his friends," McManus said of the ensuing riptide that swept Alimoren away.

McManus said the Coast Guard estimated the current was heading to the south toward the jetty area.

## **VIGIL FOR VICTIM**

On Sunday night, a vigil was held for Alimoren that was covered by Southern California CBS affiliate KCAL9 reporter Bobby Kaple at the Lighthouse Baptist Church in La Verne, Calif.

"You get to a place where you think you are done with tears, and you're not," said Pastor Jay Nepomuceno, who knew Alimoren well. He was leading the group on the trip.

"They were overwhelmed by a one wave that brought all of them down," Nepomuceno told Kaple. "Two of the boys initially started screaming for help."

Paul's brother Philip says the family is devastated.

"My mom, she couldn't even talk. She was just weeping," said Philip. His brother was a Cal State Fullerton accounting major on a full-ride scholarship.

"When they got caught by the rip tide, my brother went in after them to save his best friend," said Philip in the KCAL9 interview.

Sunday night, friends and family recalled the young man's passion for Bible study, sense of humor and his infectious laugh.

"He did everything," his brother recalls. "He was very athletic. He led our team to a couple of championships in basketball. He was really good in football, too."

The pastor said Paul was a great kid on or off any field or court. "He was an incredible leader," says Nepomuceno, "he was really one of the best teenagers I've ever worked with. He was very talented musically, athletically — but humble as well. He was just a good, Christian young man."

## **CITY REACTION**

Ocean Shores Mayor Crystal Dingler expressed sympathy for the family Monday night during the regular City Council meeting.

"We did have a tragedy in our ocean this weekend," Dingler said. "I know that we all feel very badly about it and that our hearts go out to the family and friends of this young man, and to him whose life is apparently over. We are very concerned and our sympathies are with them."

Earlier, during public comment on the upcoming 2015 city budget, several citizens questioned the City Council's decision to eliminate funding in the current budget for the city's Surf Rescue team, formerly made up of police officers and fire department personnel.

Ocean Shores resident Larry Schrupp said the ocean is a tourist attraction and the same attraction that first draws residents like him to the area.

"The beach is the reason that people come to this town," Schrupp said. "We had a tragedy this weekend, and there is no way of knowing whether or not it would have been preventable if hadn't been for one of the decisions that was made about the 2014 budget, which was to cut the Surf Rescue team."

"What we can know for sure is that more people are going to get pulled out into the tide by the riptides that are out here. It's a very dangerous beach, and I think we owe it to people to send them home alive if we can when they are done with their visit to Ocean Shores."

Ena Myers choked back tears when she described reading about Alimoren. She noted the Chamber of Commerce recently toured the Fire Station and saw some of the Surf Rescue equipment "they are no longer allowed to use." "I know it's hard to balance priorities when you have a very limited budget, but boy this is an important one," she said, suggesting as a business owner she would help establish a trust to sustain funding of Surf Rescue.

City Councilman Gordon Broadbent was not on the council when last year's budget cuts eliminated about \$52,500 for the 10-person Surf Rescue team. Before the meeting Monday, he said he would have voted to keep it. He suggested seeking a more county-wide solution or possibly state help for the service.

"We are a tourist town and sooner or later we are going to have to look at it again," Broadbent said.

Councilwoman Jackie Farra noted the Surf Rescue team also had lost two lives in the past. "It isn't all money. It's very emotional," she said.

## **Beach drowning shines light on decision to scrap surf rescue team**

<http://komonews.com/news/local/beach-drowning-shines-light-on-decision-to-scrap-surf-rescue-team>

JULY 28TH 2014 BY MATT MARKOVICH

OCEAN SHORES, Wash. -- A swimmer [lost in the surf off Ocean Shores Saturday night](#) is presumed dead, and now some say his drowning could have been prevented if the city had kept its surf rescue team.

The 18-year-old Southern California man was among eight members of a youth



group that got caught in a rip tide. His friends tried, and then police and fire crews tried unsuccessfully to find him from the shoreline. He's still missing, and heavy fog has prevented a helicopter search.

It took an hour for a Coast Guard boat to reach the scene but the city had to equipment to search the surf quicker, yet couldn't use it.

A small fleet of Seadoos, once used by the city's surf rescue team, sat idle at the fire department because city leaders decided not to spend \$55,000 required for hazard pay for the police and fire members that make up the team.

"We couldn't keep the budget for the surf rescue not only to pay the members -- there were up to 10 members --but also for training, keeping people certified," said Ocean Shores City Councilman Gordon Broadbent. "If we couldn't do it 110 percent then we are better off not to do it."

It's not a comforting thought for Jay Flansburg, who lost power on his fishing boat Monday and was about to hit the rocks at the jetty. He had just enough power to beach his boat, otherwise he was about to abandon ship, swimming for his life.

"We are still missing somebody, its tragic," Flansburg said. "They need funding."

Mayor Crystal Dingle says a death of a surf member team in training accident five years ago, whose name is imprinted on the fire trucks, overshadows the city's decision. Without up-to-date training, she doesn't want to see the Seadoos in action.

"If you are not practicing, if you are not right up to the minute using those things and have enough practice and it's practically automatic -- you can't, it's too dangerous," she said.

The new fire chief is under orders not to use the Seadoos.

"In in the moment, when you don't have that resource, you do miss it when you are standing on the shore," said Ocean Shores Fire Chief Tom Lique.

Dingle says Ocean Shores is recovering from the recession but not enough to fund the rescue team.

## Prevent More Deaths, Restore the Surf Rescue Program

<https://www.change.org/p/city-council-and-mayor-crystal-dingler-of-ocean-shores-wa-restore-surf-rescue-program-provide-sufficient-warning-signs-along-the-coast>



**My son died saving lives, now I want to make sure his death wasn't in vain.**

On July 26, 2014, my son went missing and was presumed dead after saving two of his friends from a rip current in Ocean Shores, Washington. Although 911 was called, there was nothing anyone else could do. Earlier that year the city chose to

eliminate the budget for a Surf Rescue Team (SRT) made up of police and fire personnel whose sole purpose was to save those caught out at sea. This team could quite possibly have saved my son's life and it could help prevent the loss of many more.



**Rey Alimoren**  
**Pomona, CA**

**Our family is asking Mayor Crystal Dingler and the Ocean Shores City Council to reinstate the budget for the SRT so no other lives are lost.**

My name is Rey Alimoren and I lost a part of me the day I lost my son. He was just 18, just becoming a man, and he was looked up to by so many. He was an overachiever, on a full ride scholarship on his way to becoming an accountant. He had a great sense of humor,

a passion to serve and an infectious laugh. The fact that he died saving the lives of his friends is a true testament to who he was.

**I can't help but wonder if his life would have been saved had the SRT not been cut from the budget.**

Ocean Shores is frequented by over 3 million visitors every year. This generates revenue and income for the local community. The safety of tourists as well as locals should be a top priority. So it is important for the city to take every precaution in order to prevent accidents like the one that took my son's life. The SRT should be a part of that.

Let's make sure the city is prepared the next time there's an accident. **Join me and tell Mayor Crystal Dingler and the Ocean Shores City Council to bring back the Surf Rescue Team.**

Thank you.  
Grieving Family of Paul Alimoren

**This petition was delivered to:  
Mayor of Ocean Shores, WA  
Crystal Dingler  
(Mayor of Ocean Shores, WA)**