

LBT residents want anti-submarine net removed from beach

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LONG BEACH TOWNSHIP — Some residents and township officials are fed up with what they call the band-aid approach to dealing with a stretch of rusty metal spikes of an anti-submarine net that erosion occasionally reveals embedded in the beach in Holgate.

Commissioner Robert Palmer said authorities laid the ancient-looking anti-submarine net onto the beach here to hold the sand in place after the devastating northeaster of 1962. He said Friday this is the second time in six years that erosion brought on by storms has revealed the net.

Anti-submarine nets, intended to keep submarines out of harbors during the world wars, were made of steel hoops hooked together, Steve Finnigan, curator at the Submarine Force Museum in Groton, Conn., said in 2001.

The nets were draped across the mouths of harbors to catch unwelcome submarines, whose propellers would become tangled in the nets.

There is already a sign at the end of the parking lot, just before the roughly 75-foot by 100-foot affected area, warning beachgoers that swimming or walking in the area is forbidden.

“A dangerous condition exists that may cause puncture wounds cuts scratches,” the sign ominously warns.

But residents Bill Kunz and Bill Hutson said that the sign is not enough. The two called on township officials at their caucus meeting Wednesday to cordon off the area and have the metal wires extracted to prevent an accident. Commissioner Ralph Bayard said the township might install plastic orange fencing around the area.

Kunz and Hutson — as well as Bayard and Mayor DiAnne Gove — were especially upset because Palmer, who oversees Public Works, instructed his department Wednesday from Florida, where he was on vacation, to dump sand on top of the material. Palmer said that is standard practice.

On Friday, only a handful of rigid spikes, so rusted they looked like thin, dark driftwood, breached a few inches above the sand.

Bayard called the thorny mess a safety and health hazard, and Gove said she agreed completely with Hutson and Kunz.

But Palmer, who was not at Wednesday's meeting and returned from vacation Thursday, said removing the material for good is impossible.

“There's no way to remove each one because there's hundreds of them and they're in different areas,” Palmer said Thursday. “There's no other possible way you could protect people. ... The solution is to keep them covered.”

On Wednesday, Kunz put the onus on Gove, asking her when, as mayor, she would take responsibility and take action without Palmer's permission.

“God forbid someone gets impaled on this metal,” Kunz said. “I'd have someone park the bulldozer on top of it,” instead of dump sand on it.

Bayard and Gove said they will ask Police Chief Michael Bradley to cordon off the area.

Ted Stiles, the president of the Holgate Taxpayers Association, said he's been urging the township to implement a permanent solution for the problem for the last 10 to 15 years. He said he helped raise \$3,000 in 1994 in a grassroots effort to fix the problem because the township would not take action. But the township refused the money, which was eventually donated to charity, he said.

"We're trying to get them off their butts and do it," Stiles said Friday. "All it takes is for someone to go down there with a backhoe and heavy cutters."