

Moms say children injured by metal in LBT sand

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LONG BEACH TOWNSHIP — Two local mothers told the Long Beach Township Commission on Friday afternoon that their children were injured by exposed metal in the town's Holgate section.

Submarine netting was placed along the beach following the northeaster of 1962 to help hold sand in place. Weather occasionally exposes portions of the rusting metal, but on Wednesday Commissioner Robert Palmer had said there were no reports of anyone being injured by the material.

But Nisha Kahn and Janet Johnston both said their children were hurt, although neither one of them reported the incidents when they happened. Kahn said her daughter received a large gash along her lower leg about five years ago.

Since the incident, Kahn said she was afraid to let her daughter play in the sand.

"I don't ever take her to the beach. ... To go to the beach I have to fly to Trinidad. That's totally wrong," said Kahn, who is an immigrant from the island nation.

Johnston's son, a surfer, was injured last summer when he stepped on a piece of exposed steel, she said.

"Because of the depth of the wound and the fact that the metal had splintered into small pieces, (the doctor) couldn't get all of it out," said Johnston, explaining she was worried about her son contracting tetanus for weeks after the incident.

The township plans to cover the material with large bags filled with sand. At the commission meeting, Palmer brought along a sample bag to try to alleviate concerns over whether such bags could hold up, explaining that they are strong and very heavy.

Palmer said placing the bags would cost about \$2,000. In contrast, township engineer Frank Little estimated placing jetty rocks at the site would run between \$75,000 and \$100,000.

Once placed, Commissioner Ralph Bayard said, the nylon bags would form a barrier that would help direct more sand into the area, further covering the dangerous material.

"What we're trying to do with the sand bags is start building up the sand. If it doesn't work out, we're going to have to go to a different solution," Bayard said.

But Holgate business owner Bill Hutson, who frequently butts heads with Palmer and who has been urging Palmer — head of the township's public works department — to remove the netting, again said covering the material would not be enough. He also accused Palmer of dragging his feet on the issue until Hutson complained about the problem to local media.

"Bob, to get anything done with you and I, we've had to go the newspaper route," Hutson said.

Palmer meanwhile defended his decision earlier this month to dump sand on the material when it was exposed after a February storm, saying that's the way it was done for years under the late James J. Mancini, the longtime mayor of Long Beach Township. That decision raised the ire of Hutson and other township residents.

Palmer said the idea for the sandbag plan came out of a conversation between Bayard, Little and he. But he rejected the idea of removing the netting, saying it would be impossible to remove it all.

"You could never be 100 percent sure" it was all gone, he said.

In other business: After Friday's meeting, Mayor DiAnne Gove said she was unwilling to say definitively that eminent domain would be too costly an option to pursue if the island municipalities are unable to obtain all the necessary beach-access easements required for the beach replenishment project. Earlier in the week, Surf City Mayor Leonard Connors and Beach Haven Mayor Deborah Whitcraft had both said using eminent domain would be a practical impossibility.

"Hopefully we won't have to come to that," Gove said.

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