

CURRENTS

Magnetic Surveying Begins on Beaches Where Fuses Found

Memorial Day or Sooner Eyed for Reopening

Surf City beaches will be divided into a grid, surveyed, cleaned and finally reopened section by section, said a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spokesman.

Early in March, World War II-era fuses and explosives adaptors were found on the beach, believed to have been dredged up by the beach replenishment project. About 30 items have been found to date.

The Army Corps has ordered the beaches closed to the public, and on Monday work began to clear the sands of any potentially dangerous objects.

The goal is to have all Surf City beaches reopened by Memorial Day weekend, said Khaalid Walls, a spokesman for the Philadelphia district office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Surf City Mayor Leonard T. Connors said Tuesday that U.S. Sens. Robert E. Menendez and Frank R. Lautenberg (both D-N.J.) are urging the Army Corps to have the beaches open one week before Memorial Day.

The Army Corps has contracted Weston Solutions, a West Chester, Pa., environmental and redevelopment firm, to survey and clear the beach of ordnance.

A Weston spokeswoman said Tuesday that the company is contractually prohibited from commenting to the press.

On Friday, the company began calibrating the equipment, Walls said Tuesday, and on Monday surveying began at North Fifth Street. Weston will work its way north to North 24th Street.

Several magnetometers – “basically ground-penetrating metal detectors” – will be attached to 4x4 utility vehicles, and will scan the sands as they are towed along the beach.

The magnetometers can detect objects to depths of approximately three feet, said Walls.

Weston is breaking the entire

beach down into a grid system, each section measuring roughly 200 by 200 feet. There are approximately 120 sections in total.

Each area will be surveyed, the coordinates of objects will be noted, and then workers will return to each section to clear it.

Walls said Weston uses a GPS system, so its work should be “very accurate.”

“They’ll be able to plot (objects), identify them and get back to them with significant reliability,” he said.

Should objects shift in the sand, “I’m sure that’ll be addressed as they go along.”

The Philadelphia district of the Army Corps has completed about 10 beach replenishment projects in the last decade, said Walls. This is the first time ordnance has been discovered.

Should the replenishment project continue elsewhere on the Island, it is unknown whether the Army Corps will find more military munitions.

“We aren’t expected to,” said Walls. “The best case scenario is that what we have (in Surf City) is the extent of it.”

Currently the Army Corps is looking into how the ordnance might have ended up at the bottom of the ocean, but officials have no theories they can share for the time being.

Former Beach Haven Mayor Deb Whitcraft, who will soon open her Museum of New Jersey Maritime History, said the discovery of more ordnance is “inevitable.”

“Nobody who knows anything about New Jersey maritime history is surprised about this,” she said.

According to her research, “literally dozens” of vessels were wrecked near Long Beach Island, many of them World War I and World War II losses. The effects of storms and salt water, and the passage of time, contribute to scattering of objects from wrecks, she said.



Ryan Morrill



Supplied by Army Corps of Engineers

KEEP OFF: (Top) Workers with metal detectors are sweeping the sands on Fifth Street at the Ship Bottom/Surf City border, where the replenished shoreline tapers inward, said a spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. (Above) The military ordnance – fuses and adaptors for explosives – comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. The Army Corps is warning residents to stay off the beaches in Surf City and avoid touching any unfamiliar objects.

“It’s our history coming back to bite us,” Whitcraft said.

The discovery of the ordnance will “definitely” lead the Army Corps

to take measures to prevent similar objects from reaching the beach if the project continues, but Walls said he cannot at this time detail what kind of measures might be taken.

The Army Corps has yet to determine how much the cleanup will cost and where funding for it might come from.

“At this moment we’re just moving along with the project,” Walls said.

Security guards and fencing – stretching from North 25th Street to Ship Bottom’s Fifth Street – are currently in place to keep people off the beach and away from any other munitions that might still be hidden.

A spokesman for Fort Monmouth, where some of the ordnance was taken to be destroyed, said explosive ordnance disposal experts believe the items had the potential to cause loss of limb or eyesight, and under the right circumstances cause loss of life.

— Heather Pharo

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Business: Mixed Opinions on Easter Beach Closures

As Army Corps of Engineers officials prepare to sweep and clean Surf City’s beaches to detect strange objects, including World War II-era military ordnance discovered in early March, local businesses are preparing for a sweep of another nature as the Easter holiday weekend marks the unofficial start of Long Beach Island’s busy season.

Rick Reynolds, executive director of the Long Beach Island Chamber of Commerce, said he’s had a number of calls from various media organizations asking for his take on the impact of the beach closures and the usual flux of visitors – a mix of summer homeowners, weekend travelers and those looking to celebrate the long holiday

weekend.

Corps officials are reluctant to commit to a date when the beaches will officially reopen, but local business owners seem to be confident the closures are simply a temporary inconvenience.

“It appears they have the equipment and the manpower to clear the beaches by Memorial Day or earlier,” Reynolds said on Tuesday afternoon.

“If that’s the case, I don’t see much of an impact. The folks that like to use the beach this time of year can go to other parts of LBI. If we get to Memorial Day (and the beaches remain closed) that will be a different story.”

Reynolds said the chamber would continue to monitor the

progress of the cleanup effort as well as stress to the Corps the importance of the beaches to the economy of Surf City as well as to the entire Island.

Businesses bustled along Long Beach Boulevard on Tuesday preparing for a busy holiday weekend. At Mario’s Italian Market, Mario Aversa said he knows he’ll be busy with Easter orders.

“People are down for Easter. This time of year people don’t go to the beach. They’ll see it’s all roped off,” Aversa said, adding he suspects the blocked beaches will provoke some curiosity in those visitors who aren’t aware of the situation.

Phyllis Aversa of Mario’s said she feels confident about the loy-

alty of the market’s customers. Even if weekenders decide to visit beaches at other parts of the Island, she’s certain they’ll return to Mario’s to buy their homemade Italian dishes.

At Subbogies, manager Nicole Dougherty said she started to hear comments about the beach closures last weekend, Palm Sunday, as more unfamiliar faces mixed with the regular wintertime crowd.

“They’re kind of worried and express concern – they’re just hearing that something is going on with the beaches,” she said. She predicts the Easter holiday business will be rather slow, but not because of beach closures. Instead, she said she

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