



EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2007 AT 10:00 A.M., PDT

Attention Assignment Editors, Correspondents and Reporters:

Media Advisory and Daybook Item for Monday, October 29, 2007

Contact: Craig Noble, NRDC, 415-875-6100 (office) or 415-601-8235 (mobile)
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Groups to Sue U.S. Maritime Administration for Polluting Suisun Bay

Who: Saul Bloom, Arc Ecology
Sejal Choksi, Baykeeper
Michael Wall, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

What: Press conference to announce lawsuit against the U.S. Maritime Administration

When: Monday, October 29, 2007 at 10:00 a.m., PDT

Where: Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
111 Sutter Street, 20th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104
(Corner of Sutter & Montgomery streets near the Montgomery BART Station)

IMPORTANT NOTE: Reporters interested in touring the fleet after the press conference should contact Baykeeper at 925-330-7757 before 5:00 p.m., Sunday, October 28. Only four spots are available – travel time can be up to 2 hours from San Francisco.

SAN FRANCISCO (October 29, 2007) – Arc Ecology, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and San Francisco Baykeeper are holding a press conference to announce details of a lawsuit being filed today in federal court in Sacramento to halt ongoing pollution of the San Francisco Bay ecosystem by the Maritime Administration (MARAD), an agency of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

More than 50 deteriorating military and cargo vessels are anchored in Suisun Bay, leaching toxic paint and heavy metals into the water and sediment. The environmental groups turned to litigation after MARAD rebuffed efforts by California environmental regulators to bring the agency into compliance. The suit seeks to compel MARAD to evaluate the environmental threats posed by its management and disposal of the “Mothball” or “Ghost Fleet” and require it to comply with state and federal hazardous and solid waste laws. Of particular concern are the agency’s plans to scrape toxic paint from the hulls while the boats are still in the water. The lawsuit requests the court to order MARAD to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and to store and dispose of any hazardous wastes at an appropriate land-based facility.

Many of the ships in the fleet were decommissioned and placed in storage in Suisun Bay after World War II and the Korean War with the idea that they could be reactivated at a later date for wartime use. Today, however, the vessels are not seaworthy; water must be pumped out regularly to keep them afloat, they leak fuel, and most are severely rusted with toxic peeling paint.

“We are taking this step to protect the environment from this rogue federal agency,” said Saul Bloom, executive director of Arc Ecology. “MARAD has unlawfully polluted the waters and submerged lands of the State of California for 60 years. The Maritime Administration’s ship disposal program is an extreme example of this administration’s determination to drive environmental protection to the lowest possible standards.”

“Several government studies have identified hazardous pollution on the ships, including mercury, PCBs, waste oil and asbestos,” said Sejal Choksi, Program Director for San Francisco Baykeeper. “Studies also show that sediment below the ships is now heavily contaminated and poses a threat to the aquatic ecosystem. The Ghost Fleet doesn’t belong in Suisun Bay anymore – it’s been haunting our waters for far too long.”

“MARAD is managing the Ghost Fleet in Suisun Bay in direct violation of federal and state hazardous and solid waste laws,” said Michael Wall, NRDC senior attorney. “These vessels have been obsolete for decades and are now just floating junkyards, awaiting final disposal. The Ghost Fleet presents an ongoing threat to human health and the environment.”

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Arc Ecology is a non-profit, public interest organization concerned with the ecology of humanity and its place in the global ecology. Arc Ecology combines the sciences, economics, and community planning, with education and advocacy to help inform the public agenda.

The Natural Resources Defense Council is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has 1.2 million members and online activists, served from offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Beijing.

Founded in 1989, Baykeeper is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the water quality of the San Francisco Bay and Delta for the benefit of the fish, wildlife and human communities that depend on it. Baykeeper uses science, advocacy and litigation to hold polluters accountable and enforce clean water laws. www.baykeeper.org