

Westport Marina Manager Ken Rausch Honored by Ecology Department

Local News

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A Westport Marina Manager is being honored with an environmental excellence award from the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) for going above and beyond normal duties to keep boats afloat -- reducing potential for sinking of boats and the resulting damage to the environment. Marina manager Ken Rausch also is being honored due to his extra diligence in working with boat owners and operators, Ecology's Spill Response Team, contractors, and others to contain and clean up fuel spills when they have occurred during the last two decades. Ecology will present the award to Rausch today during the Port of Grays Harbor Commission Meeting, held at 9 a.m. at the port's main office, 111 S. Wooding Street, Aberdeen. When boats take on water and sink, they often release fuel and other petroleum and toxic chemicals to the environment. Boat owners and operators who spill oil can face monetary penalties for allowing oil to pollute state waters. Because petroleum products damage the environment and can threaten fish, shellfish, birds and critical habitat areas, spillers can also be held responsible for compensating Washington citizens for damage done to the public's natural resources.

A few examples of Rausch's efforts include: When the fishing vessel Anna Lovisa inadvertently pumped a bilge full of diesel fuel overboard in the summer of 2011, Rausch and his crew responded quickly, deploying booms and absorbent sweeps and pads within an hour. The spill was all but cleaned up before any professional responder could arrive. Normally, even a small spill spreads throughout a marina and can be a problem for several tidal cycles. This response was so quick and effective that many people in the marina didn't even know there was a spill. When the derelict 152-foot crab-fishing vessel Sitkin Island was abandoned for the third time at the Port, Rausch inherited the unenviable task of keeping her afloat. After heavy rains, which are frequent in Westport, the vessel would take on water and be at risk of sinking. For more than a year, Rausch pumped off the water and then waited for the next rainstorm. Rausch's leadership and cooperation paved the way for Ecology to remove the oil and hazardous materials in the spring of 2011. Some 6,000 gallons of petroleum products and six drums of various hazardous wastes were taken off. Rausch's efforts helped keep these contaminants out of the water. In May 2009, Ken single-handedly prevented the complete sinking of the 47-foot sailboat Cristobal when the owner left the vessel unattended at the Port's Hoquiam boat launch. The vessel was too large for the launch ramp dock, and it lay on its side when the tide went out. The listing vessel was spilling diesel fuel, so Rausch hooked up extra lines with hand winches and utilized pumps to get the partially sunk vessel floating again. His actions not only saved the vessel from further damage, but also diverted a much more expensive salvage effort and minimized the amount of diesel fuel that was spilled. Southwest Regional Office Spill Response Unit Supervisor Jim Sachet said: "There have been dozens of similar situations over the years. Being an hour or two away from any Ecology facility, Westport can't be one of our daily stops. Ken is our 'eyes on the water' in that area. He is diligent in watching for problems, and can spot a boat that is listing from hundreds of yards away. He can smell fuel in the water from his office several blocks away. He hauls big boats around by a line to get them to a safe place so they can be pumped off with ease and skill. If there are super-heroes, Ken is one of ours." Sachet added that, because he does not stand around

waiting for responders to arrive, Rausch has physically cleaned up more oil from the water at Westport Marina than many full-time spill responders. Rausch and his small crew clean up oil spills using one of the spill response trailers granted by Ecology to marinas, fire departments and other agencies throughout the state in 2007. "He goes out with a smile and a great attitude, even at 2 a.m.," Sachet said, adding that one of Rausch's greatest skills is his diplomacy. Despite the fact that Rausch rigorously enforces rules and reports all spills and mishaps to Ecology and the U.S. Coast Guard, he is well-regarded by boaters. "I've never seen anyone without a smile and a kind word for Ken, and he in return," Sachet said. "Even when he's not within earshot, you'll always hear appreciation and praise for his efforts to keep the marina and the fleet and the fishing business on the right path, and pollution-free." According to Ecology records, from December 2010 through December 2011, two houseboats, 13 commercial fishing vessels and 47 recreational boats sank in Washington waters. Most of these sinking incidents also resulted in oil spills. The Environmental Excellence Award is the Department of Ecology's highest award for recognizing environmental excellence in the state of Washington. The department issues the award to individuals, businesses, and organizations that have shown leadership, innovation, or extraordinary service in protecting, improving, or cleaning up the environment.