

Cleaning underwater JUNKYARD



PHOTOS BY DAVID YAMAMOTO/SPECIAL TO THE STAR

ABOVE: Volunteer Tim Pearson (left), who teaches science in Santa Barbara, helps wrangle a squid light brought up by Ocean Defenders Alliance diver Jeff Larson on Saturday during a cleanup at Channel Islands Harbor. **TOP RIGHT:** A pile of junk recovered from underwater sits on a dock. By day's end, more than 50 man-made pollutants were hauled out of the harbor in a 60-foot by 120-foot area.

■ Dumped debris at Oxnard harbor 'is really terrible'

By Tamara Koehler
Special to The Star

First came a barnacle-crusting handcart, then the husk of a decaying boat battery covered with vermilion sea stars.

Next, bubbling up from the muck in Channel Islands Harbor in Oxnard, appeared a microwave oven, a computer screen, even a kitchen sink — all coated with mollusks, sea stars, sea anemones and other marine creatures.

"This is really terrible," Tim Pearson, a science teacher and volunteer for the conservation group Ocean Defenders Alliance, said Saturday as he cataloged a growing pile of garbage. "It is a bit daunting that this is just the tip of the iceberg and there is still so much down there."

The Orange County nonprofit was at the Oxnard marina with a small team of certified divers clearing the first of 16 county-maintained slips of debris dumped over the decades by boaters, anglers and construction crews — "just about anybody and everybody," said Kurt Lieber, president and founder of Ocean Defenders. The group

will continue the cleanup over the next few months.

The county maintains about 200 of the 2,100 slips at Channel Islands Harbor, according to the harbor district. While other areas of the harbor have been cleared of debris periodically during renovations and ownership transfers, the county's have not, said Harbor Sgt. Tom Sizemore. He suspects what lies beneath is a watery landfill.

"There's all sorts of things down there. ... It's like a garbage dump that no one sees, so they don't think it's a problem," Sizemore said.

Lieber's group has cleaned San Pedro Harbor and an area

from Catalina Island to Long Beach for the past 10 years. During that time, the group has removed 12,000 pounds of squid nets, 13,000 feet of polypropylene trap line and more than 150 lobster and periwinkle snail traps, according to its website.

Lieber said most of the traps are recycled as scrap metal, but those in good condition are returned to fishermen.

Lieber in October branched north and anchored his boat, the Clearwater, at Channel Islands Harbor while concentrating cleanup efforts around the Channel Islands. The group



Volunteer Tim Pearson, who teaches science in Santa Barbara, shows a sea star that was attached to junk brought out of the water during Saturday's Channel Islands Harbor cleanup. Next to him are Rex Levi (left) and Lisa Davis.

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CLEANUP from 1B

has a permit to work in the national marine sanctuaries off Anacapa and other islands, clearing the sea of abandoned fishing traps, lines and nets.

"It's a tragedy what happens to marine life in these abandoned nets and traps," Lieber said.

Professional fishing operations lose 10 percent to 20 percent of their traps a year, which translates to about 200 on average, Lieber said.

Pearson, who teaches science at Marymount School in Santa Barbara as well as courses at Santa Barbara City College, invited his students to participate in Saturday's cleanup. Eighth-grader Leila Parker and her mother, Christy, pulled speckled starfish, purple anemones and a black-spotted sea lemon from pipes and

plastics, then returned the wildlife to the harbor.

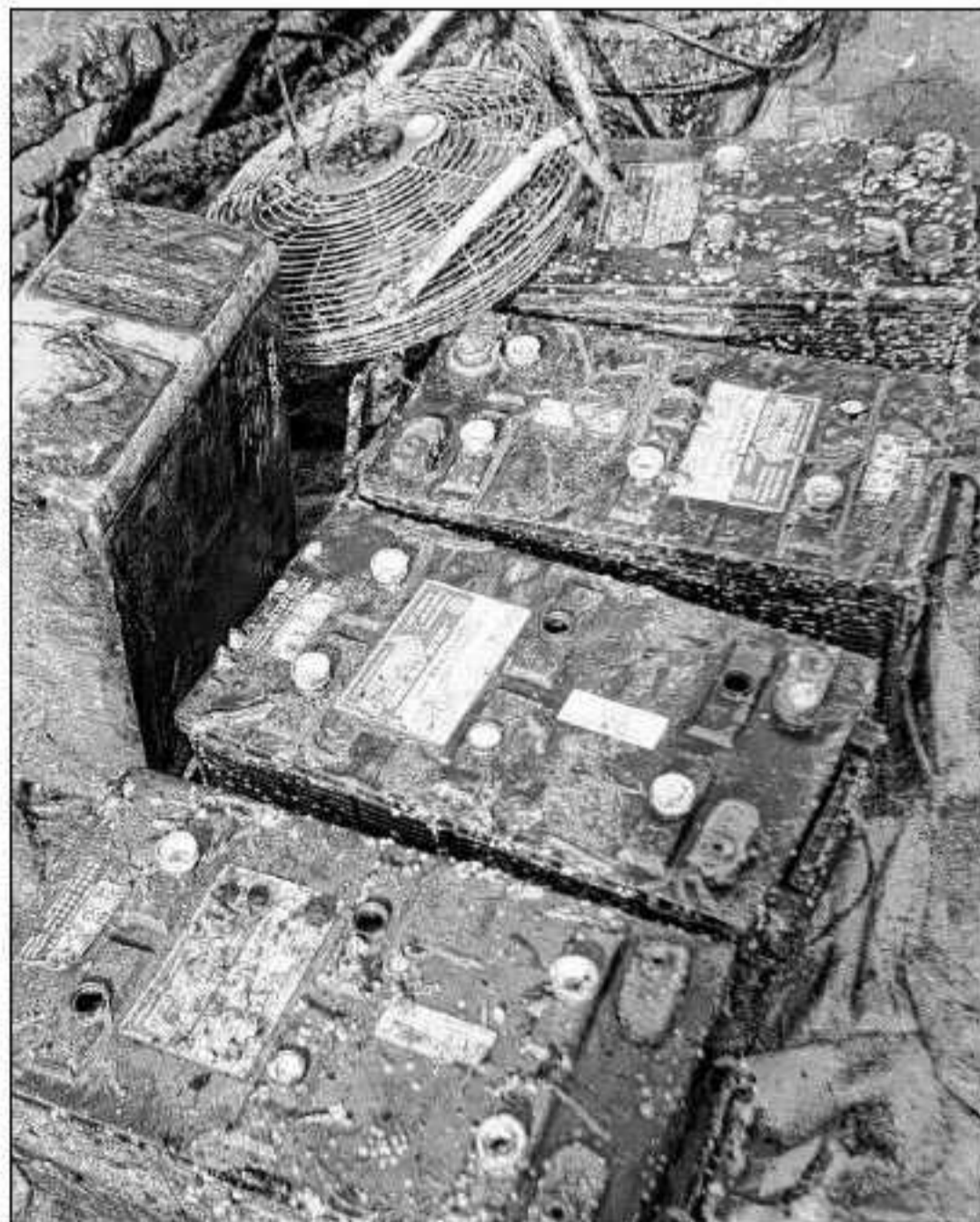
"This is helping the ocean and helping the future," said Leila, 13, holding three bright red starfish in her blue-gloved hand. Getting a nod from Pearson, she tossed them back into the harbor.

Pearson beamed.

"I teach because I'm thinking about the future, not just the present. ... I want my students to appreciate that if we don't take care of the planet, nobody else is going to," he said.

By day's end, more than 50 man-made pollutants were hauled out of the harbor in a 60-foot by 120-foot area. The list included an air compressor, a ladder, pump motors, burlap sacks, a car tire and four 100-pound boat batteries. Eight more batteries were identified to be cleared in the next dive.

On the Net:
<http://www.oceandefenders.org>



Discarded batteries found leaking underwater sit on a dock among a pile of other junk recovered Saturday from Channel Islands Harbor as Ocean Defenders Alliance divers worked with volunteers on a cleanup.