

COUNTY REPORT

Rescue Operations Win Praise for Lifeguards

By BURTON W. CHACE
County Supervisor

The recent crash of a jetliner into the waters off International Airport brought into sharper focus the importance and versatility of the Marina del Rey and the County Lifeguard Service.

Because of the fine Marina facilities and location, as well as the quick, heroic efforts of the lifeguards, the loss of lives in the crash was very low.

When I was spearheading efforts to put the Marina del Rey financing together back in the mid-1950s, the county was able to convince the federal government that the site was ideal for a Coast Guard rescue headquarters. Its proximity to International Airport and the ideal harbor facilities were strong selling points.

THESE WERE the key reasons the federal government allocated \$4.6 million to assist the county with development of the small craft harbor. And it paid off when the jetliner went into the sea.

Heroism is somewhat commonplace for the lifeguards, but their actions on that cold, rainy night were above and beyond the call of duty.

As you may have read in the newspapers, the lifeguard rescue boat, Baywatch III, was the first to arrive at the crash scene. Skipper Bill Stidham and Dick McCamy took eight of the more seriously injured aboard, including a baby.

BY THIS time, the Coast Guard unit was on the scene to take aboard the other survivors. Although the Coast Guard was dispatched from the Marina immediately, confusion over the actual crash site had detained it in other areas.

The Baywatch, like other rescue craft, was circling about three miles offshore where the plane was reported down. A helicopter spotted the wreckage eight miles offshore, and Skipper Stidham instinctively headed for the new location.

After the Baywatch rescues, a team of three lifeguard divers arrived and began a methodical undersea search of the plane in case anyone was trapped inside. The divers were John Stonier, Ronald Shaeffer and William Nisbet.

REMEMBER, all this was being done in choppy seas, 50-degree water temperature, driving rain and the dark.

The men of the lifeguard service are to be commended for their heroic efforts. Theirs was

not an easy task, but they succeeded and brought great honor to their colleagues and this county.

FAULTY gas heaters have caused the deaths of 11 persons

in Los Angeles County this year, according to Health Officer Dr. Gerald A. Heidebreder. Seven of the deaths were caused by a vented heater and at least four from unvented heating equipment.

The latest county deaths — seven members of a family in El Monte — were the result of an improperly maintained vented heater. The County Health Department investigation showed the vent had become dislodged

and the flame in the heater was not burning.

The carbon monoxide produced by the improperly burning flame was recirculated into the house by the faulty vent. The tragic thing about such deaths is

that they could be prevented if residents would have their heaters serviced annually before using the equipment.

NO PHYSICAL signs of faulty heaters need be visible, but soot-

ing, a pungent odor when the heater is turned on and sick animals or birds are often present. The only way to be sure the heater is operating correctly is to have a heating contractor, plumber or the gas company check the equipment. Carbon monoxide poisoning victims suffer a headache, grogginess and shortness of breath after exertion. Death occurs when a sufficient amount of the gas reaches the brain.

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