



Media Release

Last of 'Mothball Fleet' Ships Leaves Suisun Bay, Ending a Decade-Long Environmental Effort

For Immediate Release:
Aug. 3, 2017

Contact: David Elias
(510) 622-2509

MARE ISLAND—The cargo ship Cape Borda will be towed out of Suisun Bay in the next few days, bringing to a close the decade-long effort by the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board and environmental groups to remove the “mothball fleet” of obsolete ships that threatened water quality in the bay.

The ships, part of the Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet maintained by the Maritime Administration (MARAD), were found to be contaminating the bay with tons of heavy metal-laden toxic paint peeling from the decks and hulls, triggering a legal fight to remove them. At one point in the last decade numbering 57 ships, the fleet has been removed over the past several years to be dismantled and recycled at facilities in Brownsville, Texas, New Orleans and Mare Island.

“The removal of the Cape Borda brings to an end an ongoing source of pollution that threatened the bay and the rich aquatic life it supports for decades,” said Regional Water Board Senior Engineering Geologist David Elias. “The success of this effort demonstrates what can be accomplished by working together. We thank everyone involved in identifying this environmental threat, and working with us to get it corrected.”

After becoming aware of the problem in 2006, the Regional Water Board required MARAD to submit information and a work plan for cleaning the ship hulls. When that proved ineffective, the Regional Water Board issued orders the following year for MARAD to alleviate the problem. Notices of Violation followed when MARAD’s response to the orders was insufficient.

Several Congressional representatives and government agencies supported the Regional Water Board’s enforcement actions, including the State Lands Commission, the Department of Toxic Substances Control and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Regional Water Board filed a lawsuit in 2008, and intervened in another lawsuit filed by the Natural Resources Defense Council, San Francisco Baykeeper and Arc Ecology. In 2009, MARAD agreed to a [settlement](#) that set a timetable for the ships to be removed.

With the removal of the Cape Borda, MARAD will have met the Sept. 30 deadline for the ships to leave Suisun Bay. The event was marked by a ceremony today hosted by the Maritime Administration at the



Mare Island dry docks, which were utilized to clean the final ship of invasive species prior to departing for Texas for recycling.

Like other ships in the mothball fleet, the Cape Borda was once part of the National Defense Reserve Fleet, which served as a reserve of ships for national defense and national emergency purposes. The reserve fleet program was begun after World War II, and at its peak numbered more than 2,000 vessels nationwide.

The Cape Borda was launched in 1967 from a port in Louisiana as the SS Howell Lykes, and was used as a cargo ship hauling bulk cargo between the Gulf of Mexico and Europe for the next 18 years. It was acquired by MARAD in 1985, and renamed the Cape Borda, based in Alameda. It was one of 78 ships activated to support the Desert Storm operation in the Middle East in 1990. After returning to Alameda, it eventually entered the mothball fleet.

About San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board

The Regional Water Board's mission is to preserve, protect, enhance, and restore the quality of California's water resources and ensure their proper allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations. For additional information, please visit

<http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/index.shtml>