

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report



Meeting: December 12, 2024

From: Community Services and Recreation Department

Subject: Capitola Lifeguard Season Overview

Recommended Action: Receive a report on Capitola Lifeguard Service season statistics.

Background: In November of 2023, the City of Capitola became a Certified Open Water Lifeguard Agency through the United States Lifesaving Association (USLA). USLA is a national organization that certifies lifeguard agencies and ensures that their training program meets or exceeds professional standards. The national level certification is valid for three (3) years and the City will reapply for certification in September 2026.

During the 2024 season, the City provided lifeguard services from Memorial Day Weekend to Labor Day Weekend, seven days a week, plus weekend-only services from the weekend after Labor Day until October 31st. Additionally, some City Special Event Permits include lifeguard services. Events billed for lifeguard services are events that only go above or outside of typical staffing levels and involve activities in, or adjacent to, the ocean, and other events that draw large crowds to Capitola Beach.

Discussion: The City has the responsibility, as a USLA Certified Agency, to provide annual statistics that contribute to the USLA national data collection. The City uses web-based software, Watchtower, to record incidents and identify data trends based on activity on the beach. Below is a summary of data collected from beach activity from Summer and Fall 2024.

<u>Categories</u>	<u>2023 Involved Parties</u>	<u>2024 Involved Parties</u>
Attendance	270,287	240,600
Contacts	4,781	3,430
Prevention	1,128	1,010
Enforcements	1,089	1,230
Missing Person(s)	14	31
Minor Medical Aid	765	499
Boat	18	23
Rescues	84	81
Major Medical Aid	12	7
Drownings	0	0

This year, staff noticed a strong connection between the size of the waves (swell height) and the number of rescues and medical incidents. All of the major medical emergencies and rescues happened when the waves were over 3 feet, which is generally considered too big for beginners. Additionally, half of all rescues happened in waves larger than 4 feet, which are considered above average for most people. Of the rescues performed in Capitola, 72% were in waves 4 feet or higher. Tide height was the second most important factor linked to rescues and medical incidents. When the tide was over 3 feet, 75% of all rescues and 70% of all major medical emergencies occurred.

Special events regularly require increased staffing levels to accommodate the increased water safety necessary for the event and regular public attendance. Water activities and alcohol are

significant risk factors for beach safety. As a proactive response, staff posted temporary signage to communicate safe beach habits and to mitigate risk. This action led to 80% fewer incidents on the beach for the Art and Wine Festival than the year prior, which previously had a workload similar to the fourth of July.

Fiscal Impact: None

Report Prepared By: Nikki Bryant; Community Services and Recreation Department Director

Reviewed By: Julia Gautho, City Clerk

Approved By: Jamie Goldstein, City Manager