

# Time to dredge up a nuisance

**MARINA DEL REY:** Excavation of shoals that are cutting access to the channel will take about three months.

By Doug Irving  
DAILY BREEZE

Mounds of sand built grain by grain in the waters off Marina del Rey have become such a nuisance for boaters that government agencies are spending more than \$2 million to make them disappear.

The dredging project that begins next week near the mouth of the marina's busy channel will be the first in those waters in

nearly eight years. Dredging crews will work day and night to scoop away enough silt and sand to fill more than 100 Olympic-size swimming pools.

Project managers expect the three-month effort to cost about \$2.4 million in all, with the federal government paying for more than half of it. The county, which has warned that the buildup of sand could choke off the entrance to the marina, expects its share to come to at least \$1 million.

The dredging crews will focus on clearing the north entrance to the marina — for now. But county officials say the south

entrance and the main channel itself will also need to be dredged — a much more complicated and costly endeavor — in the years to come.

The problem has been growing for years, as grains of sand washed down the coastline on ocean currents and lodged against the breakwater outside Marina del Rey. Little by little, they formed big shoals that began to narrow the entrance to the channel.

Now the sailboats and dinner cruisers that ply the marina can use only about a third of the channel. Hazard buoys mark off the rest, floating reminders that the

danger of running aground is closing in on all sides.

"It's pretty much closing up now," said Dusty Crane, a spokeswoman for the county's Department of Beaches and Harbors.

Next Friday, a 180-foot-long barge carrying an industrial-sized excavator arm will maneuver into place at the north entrance to the channel. It will work 24 hours a day, often seven days a week, until mid-March to re-carve the channel entrance 20 feet deep.

The sand it pulls from the bottom

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should be clean enough to be dumped just off Dockweiler Beach. Waves will wash it ashore, building up the popular beach just in time for the swimmers and sunbathers of spring.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is overseeing the dredging project. It has to be done by mid-March to avoid disrupting the snowy plovers, grunion and other creatures that converge on

the area around that time.

In all, the project calls for moving about 255,000 cubic meters of sand — enough to bury at least 102 swimming pools.

Crews scooped away twice that much in 1999, the last time the Marina del Rey small craft harbor was dredged. But apart from that, the last time so much sand was pulled from the harbor bottom was in the late-1960s, according to the Army Corps of Engineers.

County officials have pushed the federal government to scour the entire channel, a project that

some estimates peg at more than \$16 million.

In April, Supervisor Don Knabe warned federal officials that the buildup of sand could bottle up the Coast Guard, life-guard and search-and-rescue boats docked in the marina — not just pleasure boaters.

Clearing the way on the north side will most likely be the easy part. To the south, Ballona Creek has spat contaminated sand and sediments into the water that will be much more difficult and expensive to clean up.