

Blasting caps are found in Huntington Beach

EXPLOSIVES: Authorities set a "no cell phone" zone during recovery from harbor. Devices were referred to as "unstable."

By Gillian Flaccus

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Divers worked Wednesday to recover at least eight wired blasting caps discovered in a Huntington Beach harbor. Authorities ordered a ban on cell phone use to prevent accidental detonation of the devices.

The explosives were described as commercial grade detonators used to trigger large explosions in mines or other sites and were considered highly unstable, Orange County Sheriff's Department spokesman Jim Amormino said.

They are about the size of a cigarette and were spread over a 150-yard area beneath 9 feet to 15 feet of water, he said. Each cap was attached to a 10-foot-long, brightly colored wire and the caps appeared to be intentionally placed on the ocean floor within the past 36 hours, he said.

"They are very unstable in salt water. They do pose a threat to the divers, any swimmers, any boaters in the area," but not to nearby homes or large yachts, he said.

Amormino added that cell phone signals could trigger the caps, so a "no cell phone" zone was ordered around the recovery site.

A blasting cap is normally used as a detonator when connected to a larger explosive, such as TNT, but divers hadn't found any evidence of stronger explosives. By itself, this type of cap is capable of causing an explosion equivalent to that of a hand grenade, he said.

The devices were discovered late Tuesday by environmental divers



hired to check on algae growth in the harbor, officials said.

"The question is ... how did they get there? We have no idea," he said, adding that officials think it's unlikely the explosives are from the nearby Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station.

Amormino said investigators believe the caps were placed in the water sometime in the past two days based on the corrosion on the wires.

Several agencies were called to help remove the explosives, including the bomb squads from the Orange County Sheriff's Department and Los Angeles Police Department, the FBI, the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

The caps were placed in a reinforced box and will be taken to a remote location and detonated. Terrorism is not suspected.



Divers from the Orange County Sheriff's Department bomb squad gather near a buoy Wednesday in Huntington Beach to coordinate their search for blasting caps found underwater. Divers worked to recover at least eight wired blasting caps. The blasting caps, left, are carted off.

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