

High fuel costs force Coast Guard cutbacks

Coast Guard patrol missions cut by 25 percent

SEABROOK (AP) — Coast Guard boats that should be patrolling the Texas coast for safety violations are docked in Galveston.

In Houston, helicopters that usually fly daily searches for drug smugglers are on the ground.

All along the Texas coast and into the Midwest, rising fuel costs have forced the Coast Guard to cut back nearly every type of patrol but search-and-rescue missions by about 25 percent, officials said.

"I had no other recourse," said Rear Adm. Paul Pluta, whose Eighth Coast Guard District covers 26 states and includes 1,200 miles of Gulf Coast and 10,300 miles of navigable rivers.

Oil prices have increased dramatically in recent months, reaching \$34 a barrel in March, almost \$10 higher than in January. Prices were down to about \$28 a barrel this month.

Covering the cost of the higher fuel prices for the Eighth District would take between \$700,000 and \$1.3 million, Pluta said.

It's just the latest funding problem for a Coast Guard that's still using boats and planes dating back to the Vietnam era and before, he said.

Congress is discussing the possibility of appropriating more money to make up for the shortfall, but it could take weeks, Pluta said.

"With all the budget surplus out there, the Coast Guard should be given the money to do their job," said Frank Reynolds, 51, who keeps a 54-foot motorboat in Seabrook.

The cutbacks will mean fewer patrols for boating safety violations,

less frequent maintenance of channel markers and less time spent enforcing environmental regulations for fishing and shrimping boats, officials said.

In Galveston, the marine safety unit has reduced offshore flights and consolidated harbor patrols from three days a week to one, Lt. Marie Byrd said.

In general, Coast Guard units have stopped routine safety patrols, but are responding to any reports of wrongdoing, Byrd said.

The effects stretch beyond the

In New Orleans, Benton Brown, harbormaster for the Southern Yacht Club, said his yacht club can rely on the sheriff's department patrolling the northern half of Lake Pontchartrain and local police patrolling the southern half.

Search and rescue operations will remain the first priority, Pluta said.

In the Pacific Northwest, Chief Warrant Officer Chris Haley said the shortage is theoretical, so far.

"They've told us to be prepared for operational cuts, and right now we're looking at our budget to see where we can cut, what we can cut, and still provide the best service to the public," Haley said.

He said his 13th District had some financial cushion built in. "That enables us to think about it rather

"With all the budget surplus out there, the Coast Guard should be given the money to do their job."

— Frank Reynolds motorboat owner

Texas coast.

"If the buoys aren't maintained, it could cause us problems," said Dave Harms of Lake City, Minn., who boats on the upper Mississippi River. "The barges are having enough trouble with low waters."

Shrimper Jody Collins, 53, said a lessening of the Coast Guard's presence around Seabrook may not be such a bad thing.

Shrimpers already comply with environmental regulations, he said, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department duplicates many Coast Guard services, anyway.

"This is just a way for the Coast Guard to get more money," he said.

In some areas, other safety patrols and police organization will be able to make up for the cutbacks.

than immediately start making the cuts like they are in other parts of the country," he said.

Haley noted that in Woods Hole, Mass., the station involved in the recovery of John F. Kennedy Jr.'s plane had used so much of its budget it was sending patrols only in emergencies.

Coast Guard Commandant, Admiral James M. Loy, said in his State of the Coast Guard address in March that he was working with Congress and government agencies to increase funding for the Coast Guard.

"A lot of our problems are the kind that can be solved by throwing money at them," Loy said.

Peter Davidson, director of the Corpus Christi Marina in Texas, said the Coast Guard's presence is necessary.

In the depths



College Station resident Jim Woosley SCUBA dives in the diving well at the Student Recreation Center on Wednesday. Woosley, who has been a SCUBA instructor since 1975, teaches basic SCUBA diving at the Rec Center as part of the Rec-sports program.

State Attorney to try teen as adult

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Scores of grieving children, parents and colleagues brought flowers and notes Saturday to the middle school where a popular English teacher was fatally shot on the last day of classes.

In a courtroom across town, a judge ordered that 13-year-old Nathaniel Brazill remain in custody while a grand jury considers what charges should be brought against him in Barry Grunow's death.

State Attorney Barry Krischer, known to back zero tolerance attitudes in dealing with juvenile crime, said he decided to charge the teen-ager as an adult, the *Miami Herald* reported in its Sunday edition.

"It shouldn't be so easy for juveniles to get a gun," Krischer told the newspaper, "just because they have no impulse control."

The seventh-grader had been sent home by an assistant principal Friday around 1 p.m. for throwing water balloons in class. According to police, he rode his bicycle back to school about two hours later with a semi-automatic pistol in his pocket.

The pistol — a compact, 5-inch

"It shouldn't be so easy for juveniles to get a gun."

— Barry Krischer State Attorney

model called a Raven — was loaded with four bullets he had stolen from his grandfather's dresser drawer a week before, Police Chief William Smith said.

Brazill was trying to talk to girls in Grunow's class.

When the teacher told him to get out of his class, he pulled out the pistol and shot Grunow in the head. Grunow was the father of two and had worked at the school for seven years.

Police say the boy rode away on his bicycle, but flagged down a police officer about a quarter of a mile from school and surrendered. He told investigators he liked Grunow.

"Everybody's talking about the case, but we need to try to figure out what made him do that," said Corey Jacks, a pastor and neighbor of Brazill's.

Early Saturday, Brazill, wearing a two-piece khaki jail uniform, his hands shackled, appeared before Palm Beach County Circuit Court Judge LaBarga and a courtroom packed with cameras and reporters.

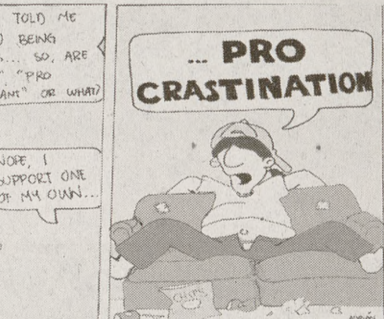
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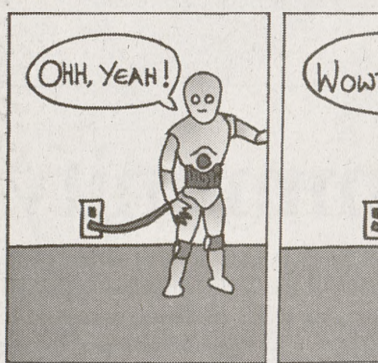
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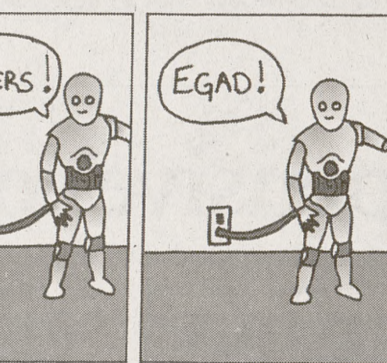
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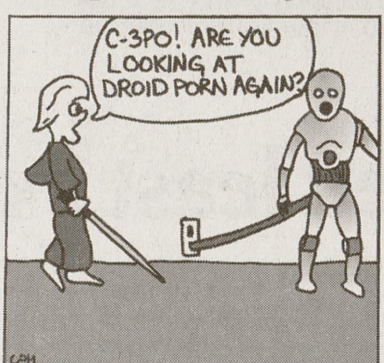
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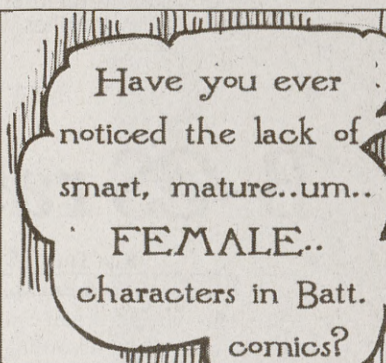
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