



AFTER THE DELUGE: SANTA MONICA PIER AQUARIUM SWAMPED WITH RESPONSES TO THE OCTOPUS-INDUCED FLOOD

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Santa Monica, (CA) March 2, 2009 –The second flood in as many days at the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium began as soon as the news hit that its [two-spotted octopus](#) tampered with a valve in its tank, depositing at least 200 gallons of water around the Aquarium gallery and in staff offices.

The Aquarium fielded dozens of phone calls and e-mails Friday inquiring how the public might help with the cleanup and with questions about the precocious cephalopod that caused the chaos.

The most effective way to help the Aquarium is to participate in the [Aquadoption program](#), sponsoring one of seven of the local species on display at the Aquarium – including the octopus. A yearlong “aquadoption” helps pay for the care of the animals - and, in the case of the two-spot octopus, will help offset the associated cleanup costs from the Thursday, February 26, seawater spill. More information is available at the Aquarium’s website: www.healthebay.org/smpa.

The flooring in the Aquarium’s three offices was installed just last fall for approximately \$8,000, Aquarium Director Vicki Wawerchak said. The product is somewhat expensive because it is made of sustainable materials, Wawerchak explained. These environmentally friendly products were chosen partly to help the Aquarium gain its Green Business Certification. The cabinetry surrounding the octopus’ tank, one of six tanks directly impacted by the flood, were installed a year ago. The work to resurface those cabinets, warped by the spilled seawater, will cost at least \$6,000.

Funding for these projects was provided through a combination of government and corporate grants. “Now our focus is trying to find additional funding sources to repair and replace the damaged exhibits and flooring,” Wawerchak said.

Visiting the Aquarium at 1600 Ocean Front Walk, beach level at the Santa Monica Pier, is another important way show support. The Aquarium’s emphasis is on teaching visitors about the marine life of the Santa Monica Bay. All the local species on display – from the cephalopods to the crustaceans, the sharks and the sand dollars – inspire conservation and stewardship. (The Aquarium is owned and operated by Heal the Bay, the Santa Monica-based environmental group.)

Visitors can learn about the care of the animals as well; a public presentation and feeding at the open shark tank takes place at 3:30 p.m. every Sunday. Improptu discussions with staff as they care for the marine life provide a wealth of information and motivate tens of thousands of students, tourists, and local residents to become involved in the preservation of the marine environment an experience that wouldn’t be possible without the animals housed and exhibited at the Aquarium, explained Jose Bacallao, the senior aquarist who cares for the animals and maintains the center’s life support system. Bacallao and his staff log daily observations of all the organisms, and make adjustments to their diet, water chemistry, and in the case of the gregarious octopus – introduce various toys and natural, live prey, including shore crabs and sand crabs.

Today Bacallao installed a rigid, hard line mechanism to replace the flex line tubing that the octopus pulled apart. A lead weight atop the tank was added to provide extra security against any further octopus antics.

Visit the Aquarium during public hours: Tuesday through Friday, 2:00 to 5:00 p.m., and weekends, 12:30 to 5:00 p.m.

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