

BULLETIN

NO: 26-017
DATE: February 11, 2026
TO: All Personnel
FROM: Daniel Eddy, Assistant Fire Chief, Operations
SUBJECT: Green Sheet – SDFD's South Mission Beach Jetty Incident

Attached is the Informational Summary Report of Serious/Near Serious Injuries (Green Sheet) for the South Mission Beach Jetty Incident

Thank you to all the Lifeguards and Fire Personnel who shared their experiences for this review.

- **Refer to the SDFD Operations Manual**
 - **SI 10 Section 04 Safety Communications**
- **Please review this as a crew to share all your knowledge and experiences**
 - Supervisors can add their crew members for Vector Solutions assignment completion on all Health & Safety material

Approved by

- Kyle Smith: SDFD Health & Safety Officer

This review was conducted by the following San Diego County Health and Safety Section's Serious Incident Review Team (SIRT) members.

- Ted Porter: SIRT Sub-Committee Co-Chair – Coronado Fire – Division Chief
- Steve Wecklich: SIRT Sub-Committee Co-Chair – Vista Fire – Division Chief
- Jon Jordan: Team Lead – Lakeside Fire – Division Chief
- Kyle Smith: Agency Administrator – San Diego Fire-Rescue – Battalion Chief
- Wayne Whitney: Lead Investigator – San Diego Fire-Rescue – Fire Investigator/Captain
- Robbie Williams: Investigator Trainee – Encinitas Fire – Captain
- Brian Clark: Investigator Trainee – San Diego Fire-Rescue – Lifeguard Lieutenant
- Kyle Smith: Department Health & Safety Officer – San Diego Fire-Rescue – Battalion Chief
- David Stepp: Training Representative – San Diego Fire-Rescue – Captain
- Jeff Hernandez: Document Specialist – Santee Fire – Battalion Chief
- Bill Frisch: Document Specialist – Encinitas Fire – Captain
- Jamie Hazlewood: Labor Representative – Lakeside Fire – Battalion Chief
- Jamie Hazlewood: Safety Representative – Lakeside Fire – Battalion Chief

Any questions should be directed through the chain of command.

Don't hesitate to contact the Health and Safety Office at SDFDHealth&Safety@sandiego.gov

with comments or areas of improvement. For all other questions, contact HSO/Battalion Chief Kyle Smith at 619.533.4466 or kasmith@sandiego.gov



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Informational Summary Report of Serious/Near Serious Injuries, Illnesses, Accidents or Significant Incident



GREEN SHEET

San Diego Fire-Rescue Department

"South Mission Beach Jetty Incident"

March 28, 2025

Incident Number **FS25057681**

South Mission Beach North Channel Jetty at

700 North Jetty Road

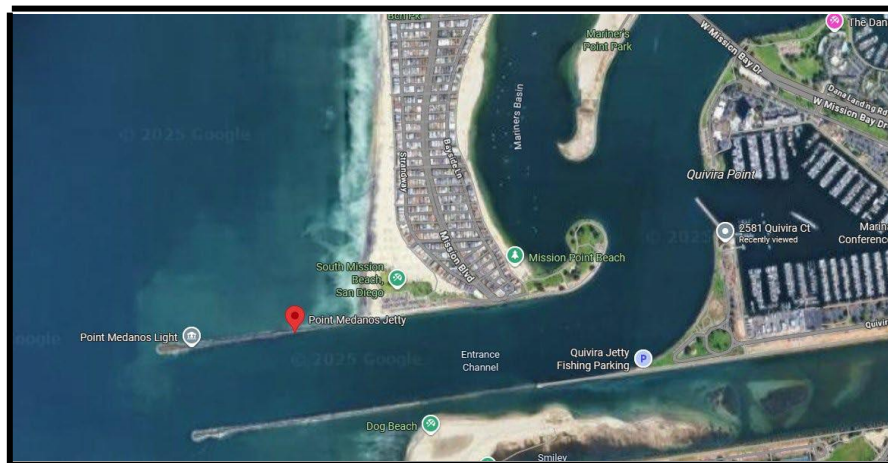
San Diego, California

A Board of Review has not approved this Informational Summary Report. It is intended to enhance safety and training, aid in preventing future occurrences, and to inform interested parties. Because the report is published in a short time frame, the information contained herein is subject to revision as further investigation is conducted and/or additional information is developed.

SUMMARY

On March 28, 2025, at 1829hrs, a San Diego Fire-Rescue Department's (SDFD) Lifeguard witnessed a couple walking out on the north channel jetty at South Mission Beach (SMB). The SMB Lifeguard station made a public announcement warning the couple of the danger. Lifeguards dispatched a rescue boat to warn the couple. Shortly thereafter, Lifeguards lost visual of one of the two citizens near the western edge of the jetty, then, following a large wave, lifeguards lost visual of both citizens. The San Diego Lifeguards initiated a response to search and rescue the couple from the jetty. A hoist helicopter was added to the incident to assist with the extraction of the victims. Multiple rescuers were injured when they were struck by large waves and thrown against the rocks while attempting to rescue and extract an unconscious civilian.

**South
Beach
Jetty
Location**



**Mission
North
Incident**

Video Link to SMB North Jetty Flyover

<https://youtu.be/z1nRoWRjrLQ>

CONDITIONS

Weather:

- Weather: Partly Cloudy to Overcast skies
- Temperature: High- 60°F
- Average Wind Speed: 8 mph W
- Precipitation: 0.0 inches

Water Conditions:

- Fast Building W/NW Swell
- Surf 6-8' Occasional 10-12' sets
- Interval 8-10 seconds
- Tides: Low Tide for San Diego occurred at 15:23 hours and was approximately -0.59
High Tide for San Diego occurred at 21:33 hours and was approximately 5.88'
- Dynamic and dangerous conditions

Topography:

- The incident occurred along the north side of the Mission Bay channel jetty at South Mission Beach in the Mission Beach community of San Diego, California. The victims were located near the tip of the roughly 2,180-foot-long jetty, beyond the Point Medanos Light. The jetty is constructed with riprap made of very large rocks with large void spaces between them, creating very rugged, jagged, and hazardous terrain that is difficult to cross on foot.

Road Conditions and Structural Features:

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- Not a significant factor in this incident

Erosion Control Materials:

- Riprap

Deterioration of The Erosion Control Features:

- Not a significant factor in this incident





Heavy surf conditions at victim's location

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

1829hrs - A lifeguard staffing the South Mission Beach Tower witnesses a wave knock down two people taking photographs on the jetty. The people did not respond to public addresses (PA) from the lifeguard in the observation tower. The guard immediately contacts Lifeguard Dispatch and requests a surf boat respond “no code” to check the disposition of the citizens.

1829hrs- 2 Sam upgrades to a code 3 response and adds Jet 2. Rescue 3 requests to be added to the incident due to Rescue 3’s close proximity to the request to check the disposition. Rescue 3 is not a surfboat and is single-staffed. A surfboat (Rescue 5) crew of two hears the call and responds from the Boating Safety Unit (BSU) at Quivira Basin.

1830hrs- 2 Sam downgrades to a no-code response after reports that the people are “high and dry” on the jetty in the rocks.

1831hrs- South Mission Tower Lifeguard can no longer see the people on the jetty. Last seen in the center of the channel on the rocks near the tip of the jetty.

1832hrs- Rescue 3 reaches the landmark of the white box on the jetty.

1833hrs- Rescue 3 sees the male victim waving, but can’t see the female—the male points to the north. Rescue 5 verbalizes on dispatch 1 that they are responding. Rescue 3 advises Rescue 5 to respond code.

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1834hrs- Initial request made for fire and medics (E20 & M4). The request came from Rescue 3, who was now on scene, seeing that the victims were potentially injured on the jetty. Rescue 3 requests fire and medics respond and stage at Lifeguard Headquarters. Rescue 3 directs Rescue 5 into the area, stating the male victim is about 10 feet from the tip and just went down on the north side, possibly inside the rocks. Arriving Rescue 5 reports they cannot see the victims. Rescue 3 states the last seen point and says the victims might be in the rocks.

1836hrs- Rescue 5, unable to see the victims from the surfboat and unable to safely deploy the surfboat crew onto the jetty at the point where the victims were last seen, heads inside the channel further east to try to place the crew on the rocks to then scramble out towards the victims. 4 Sam requests a helicopter.

1837hrs- Jet 2 arrives on scene at the jetty.

1838hrs- Crews from both Rescue 5 and Jet 2 are deployed onto the jetty in the channel and scrambling up the riprap and west to reach the victims. 2-Sam arrives at South Mission Beach. Neither crew member deployed on the jetty from the vessels has radio communication, and they are communicating with the operator of Rescue 5 using hand signals.

1839hrs- Metro reaches out to LCC to inquire which channel Fire/Medic resources should respond on. LCC states Lifeguard Dispatch 1.

1840hrs- 4-Lincoln inquiries, clarifying two people are missing at the end of the jetty, and states 4-L responding.

1841hrs- 21-Sam and 4-Sam arrive on scene at South Mission Beach.

1842hrs- A lifeguard with a radio starts walking out on the jetty from South Mission Beach and is well behind the first two lifeguards who were dropped off over halfway out on the jetty from Rescue 5 and Jet 2.

1843hrs- Copter 2 responding. Rescue 5 reported (with view from channel) the last set of waves as “nasty” on and around the end of the jetty. A couple of minutes later, the conditions were also reported as “sketchy.”

1844hrs- Rescue 5 informs Jet 2 to be ready to pick up the Lifeguards if they get taken out by a wave while walking out on the Jetty.

1845hrs- Fire/Medics arrive at Lifeguard Headquarters as their designated staging location.

1845hrs- Rescue 3 picks up a Lifeguard from the Jetty at South Mission Beach to take the Guard further out on the Jetty. Rescue 5 requests that Rescue 3 assist in identifying the location where Rescue 3 last saw the victims.

1846hrs- Lifeguard Communication Center reports a second call in La Jolla.

1846hrs- 2-Sam establishes Jetty command and requests resources on this call to switch to Lifeguard Dispatch 2.

1846hrs- SDPD requested for crowd control at 700 North Jetty Rd by 21-Sam.

1847hrs- Lifeguards “down in the crack” with the victims, and the rescue boat is waiting for a signal.

1848hrs- 4 Lincoln assumes command. Lifeguards determine that at least one of the victims will require helicopter extrication.

1850hrs- Radio transmission states there are currently three guards on the tip of the jetty with the two victims.

1852hrs- Female victim is “being worked on in the hole” under the rocks in the jetty. Lifeguards are attempting to get her up on the rocks.

1854hrs- Radio communication to the helicopter from IC reports a female victim with serious injuries wedged in the rocks of the jetty. Three lifeguards are currently on scene working to get her out. Plan A is a helicopter extraction to the turning circle at Quivira HQ, where E20 and M4 are staged.

1855hrs- Copter 2 arrives over the scene. The female victim was reported to be unconscious with a pulse and shallow breathing.

1859hrs- Battalion 3 arrives on scene. The updated report is that there are now four lifeguards with the victims. Crews are taking cervical spine precautions on a 35-year-old female (Patient 1). The male (Patient 2) has minor leg injuries.

1903hrs- Copter 2 Helicopter Rescue Medic (HRM) inserted onto the tip of the jetty by hoist.

1905hrs- Copter 2 verbalizes the possibility of a direct transport of Patient 1 to the hospital, depending on assessment of severity by HRM.

1910hrs- Copter 2 requests IC contact Sharp Memorial Hospital to confirm their helicopter pad is clear and available for direct transport if needed.

1911hrs- Copter 2 witnesses and reports to IC that multiple rescuers are down. HRM and lifeguards are hit by large waves and pushed into the jetty rocks—copter 2 requests more resources on the jetty and the addition of a Coast Guard helicopter.

1912hrs- An additional rescue boat is sent out to the tip of the jetty. A couple of radio transmissions requesting a status update on lifeguards go unanswered.

1913hrs- HRM and Patient 1 are lifted off the jetty by Copter 2 and en route to Quivira.

1914hrs- Lifeguards report a lifeguard is injured and needs extrication. Lifeguard is the third victim (Patient 3) and is conscious and breathing. The lifeguard is partially mobile and is working to move to a safer spot.

1915hrs- Two additional lifeguards from the field are placed on Rescue 3 to go out and assist on the jetty. Copter 2 makes a request for an additional ambulance to Quivira for the injured HRM.

1916hr- Coast Guard is briefing the mission. Units on the ground state will need the Coast Guard helicopter to remove additional victims. Copter 2 transfers Patient 1 to the ground ambulance crew and states they can do a second rescue if needed, despite the injuries to the HRM.

1917hrs- Second ALS (M5) requested and responding to Lifeguard HQ. Lifeguards on the jetty report that they are making slow progress, but are walking everyone else back to the shore. At this point, they report being approximately 20 yards from Point Medanos Light.

1918hrs- A third ambulance (M39), for a total of 3, is requested for the incident.

1920hrs- Rescue 3 deploys two additional lifeguards on the jetty just east of Point Medanos Light. Rescue 3 states he wouldn't feel comfortable picking off an injured victim due to the conditions.

1923hrs- Patient 2 and 3, along with the remaining lifeguard rescuers, report they are all ambulatory and walking back toward the shore. IC requests Copter 2 to provide area lighting for the jetty. Two additional ALS ambulances (M85 & M20), for a total of 5, and an additional engine (E80) are requested to the scene. EMS 72 has also been added to the incident.

1924hrs- Jetty team updates: Patient 2 is now on the east side of Point Medanos Light. Patient 3 is still to the west and will walk as far as he can and then enter the water for extrication. Jet 2 is assigned to pick up the injured lifeguard (Patient 3.)

1927hrs- Copter 2 over the jetty, providing lighting reports. There are lots of big waves crashing over the jetty, and they are still presenting a risk to everyone on the jetty. Copter 2 is closely monitoring all of them until they are in a safe location. The Coast Guard helicopter is in the air with an ETA of 25 minutes.

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1935hrs- Copter 2 reports they are headed to the Quivira LZ to have the HRM treated. The Coast Guard helicopter will take over lighting operations upon arrival. Rescuers and victims are making slow but steady progress across the jetty and are still taking some significant waves.

1937hrs- Injured lifeguard is safely on board Rescue West and being taken to Quivira for transport to the hospital.

1943hrs- HRM is transported to the hospital by M85. One ALS ambulance is sent from staging to Quivira to rendezvous with the injured lifeguard on Rescue West.

1952hrs- All lifeguards and Patient 2 made it back to the sand and are being evaluated—units requested to cancel the Coast Guard helicopter (never made it on scene).

1954hrs- All rescuers are accounted for, and a couple are being medically evaluated.

2001hrs- Rescue operations are declared complete.

2002hrs- Rescue 3 arrives back at the Lifeguard HQ dock.

2019hrs- IC is terminated.

INJURIES/DAMAGES

Injuries:

- Civilians
 - Female victim with severe injuries; Male victim with minor injuries;
- Rescuers
 - LG1 - Lifeguard sustained a fractured metatarsal bone and a laceration requiring stitches. LG1 was transported to the hospital via Paramedics.
 - LG2 - No Injuries.
 - LG3 - Lifeguard sustained lacerations to the face requiring stitches, an injured finger, and cracked the PPE helmet. LG2 was transported to the hospital.
 - LG4 - Lifeguard sustained multiple lacerations on the forehead, concussion, neck pain, strained bicep, laceration to right shoulder, bruise to right hip and quadricep, laceration to right quadricep, and laceration to right lower leg. LG4 was transported to the hospital via Paramedics.
 - HRM1 - HRM sustained a concussion and significant head, neck, thigh, and ankle injury. HRM was transported to the hospital via Paramedics.

Damages: Minor equipment damage was reported due to operational use.

Applicable Safety Policies

SDFD Air Operations Manual-Hoist Operations:

- Water Rescue Operations, Section 06, Pages 1-6

SDFD Air Operations Manual- Uniform / PPE / Equipment:

- Personal Safety Equipment, Flight Helmet, Section 01, Pg. 1

SDFD Air Operations Manual-Uniform / PPE / Equipment:

- Personal Safety Equipment, Personal Flotation Device (PFD), Section 01, Pg. 5

Note: Outside agencies should review their applicable operations policies shown above

SAFETY ISSUES FOR REVIEW

Situational Awareness-

- In situations with high surf, high winds, or other significant weather or environmental events, use a spotter/lookout and establish benchmarks.

Accountability/Egress-

- During incidents involving large numbers of personnel working in hazardous areas, an accountability officer is assigned to assist with tracking personnel and ICS positions.

Communication-

- The first several rescuers did not have radios with them at the patients' locations. Earlier radio availability could have resulted in better scene size-up/description for the IC and incoming units.

INCIDENTAL ISSUES/LESSONS LEARNED

Situational Awareness-

- Lifeguard operators were very busy. Needed to keep eyes on and direct crews on the jetty to find victims while simultaneously observing intensifying surf conditions. Operators were also the communications link between Jetty crews and IC on the shore.
- After the insertion of HRM, the Crew Chief and Pilot were aware of and monitored the high surf environment, understanding that waves could become an issue, which they did.
- Crew Chief and Pilot discussed primary, alternative, and some contingency plans for patient disposition once extracted. Multiple plans were being considered in real-time while working with incomplete information on patient statuses.

Operational-

- Evaluate code responses for lifeguard incidents.
- Evaluate the need for a standardized response plan for jetty incidents
- Rescuers on the Jetty exhibited extreme resolve after the large wave impact. All involved shared a moment of disorientation as the wave “yard sell’d, rag doll’d, throttled” them. The disorientation was short-lived, and a refocus on the rescues and tasks at hand occurred within seconds.
- Air Operations personnel should consider the use of a PFD (personal floating device) when working in or around water.

Logistic-

- The use of a formal ICP could be helpful for similar situations. A Battalion Chief vehicle can be utilized as a formal ICP.

Accountability/Egress-

- An accountability system would be beneficial to the lifeguards. In the rare occurrence of multiple rescuer deployment for single-victim incidents, a formal accountability component should be established.
- In this incident, radio traffic indicated that the IC was aware of the locations and roles of resources. Whether the information could be formally transferred/turned over in an expanding ICS tree is unknown.
- Ambulatory extraction of patient #2 on the Jetty required evaluation of multiple variables: the patient's status (physically, emotionally, mentally), the high-surf environment, lighting, travel time, and the potential unavailability of the helicopter resource due to HRM injury.

Communication-

- Crew and operators were efficient in using hand signals to communicate the number of patients, their status, and whether a helicopter was needed. Operators shared information with IC in a timely fashion.
- It was recognized that a radio was needed at the rescue site, and a rescuer with a portable radio was deployed.
- Initial rescuers would benefit from having a radio on their initial contact.
- The HRM hands-free helmet comms continued to function after the impact with the jetty rocks, resulting in severe damage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Situational Awareness-

- To account for the dynamic nature of water incidents, ensure rescuers at all levels are familiar with and can implement the PACE acronym for plans/action (Primary, Alternative, Contingency, Emergency)

Operational Recommendations-

- For rapidly expanding / complex incidents, consider utilizing a Battalion Chief and command vehicle for unified command / ICP.
- Consider formal PPE guidelines for lifeguards.
- Consider SOGs for Jetty Rescues

Logistics Recommendations-

- None

Training Recommendations-

- Jetty and Coastal Rescue Training (Air Operations / Lifeguards)
- Consider additional ICS training for rapidly expanding/complex incidents.

Administrative Recommendations-

- Develop / Implement Jetty Closing Policy

Accountability/Egress-

- Consider a formal May Day procedure for lifeguards.

Communications-

- The first lifeguards to arrive at the jetty should consider bringing a radio.
- Use a single source for ordering resources (from a single radio channel)
- Consider keeping additional dry bags available for radios in wet locations.
- Consider a standardized process for when to switch to a secondary command channel.
- Consider utilizing a tactical channel(s) for rapidly expanding / complicated incidents.

Approved by

- Kyle Smith: SDFD Health & Safety Officer

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- Jamie Hazlewood: Labor Representative - Lakeside Fire - Battalion Chief
- Jamie Hazlewood: Safety Representative - Lakeside Fire - Battalion Chief

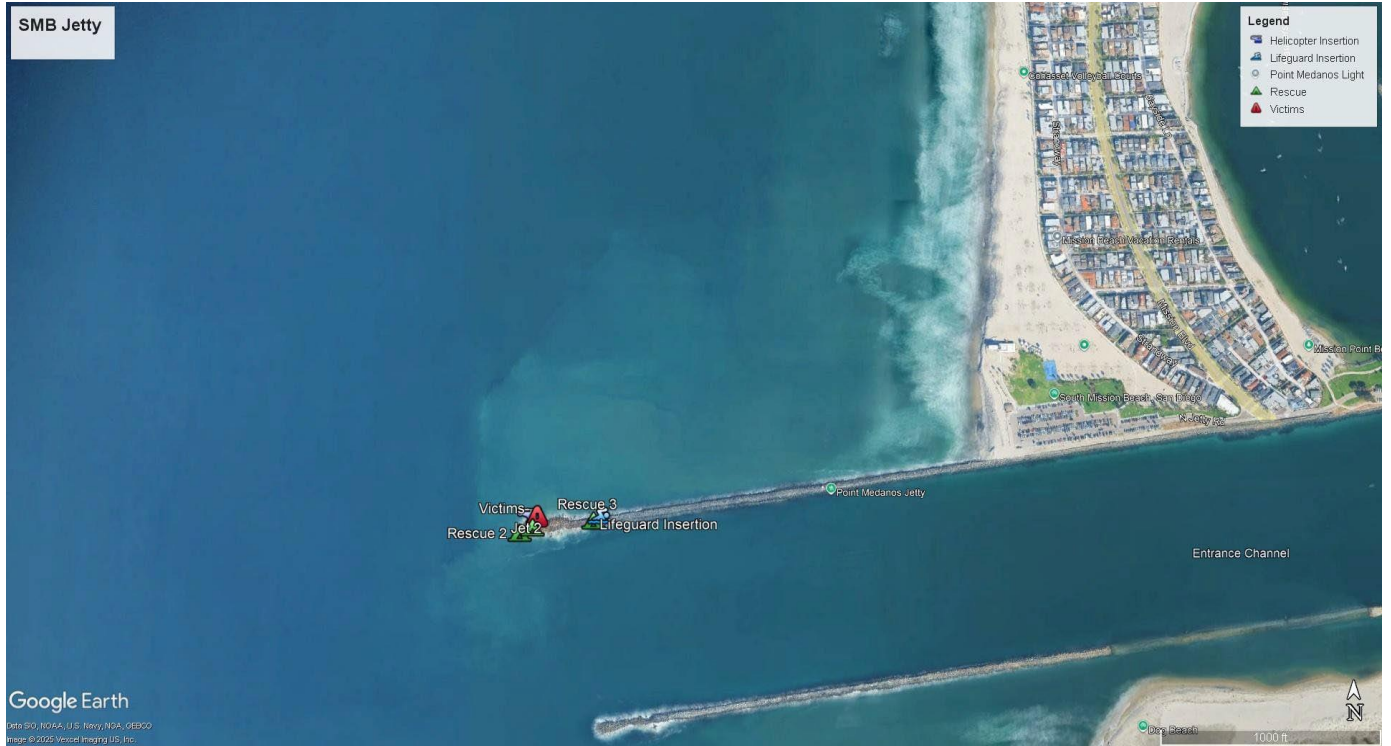
PHOTOS/SITE DIAGRAMS/MAP



Picture 1- HRM helmet after being struck against rocks by waves.



Picture 2- Lifeguard helmet after being struck against rocks by waves.



Picture 3 – Overview of Jetty, Victims, Helicopter, and LG Personnel

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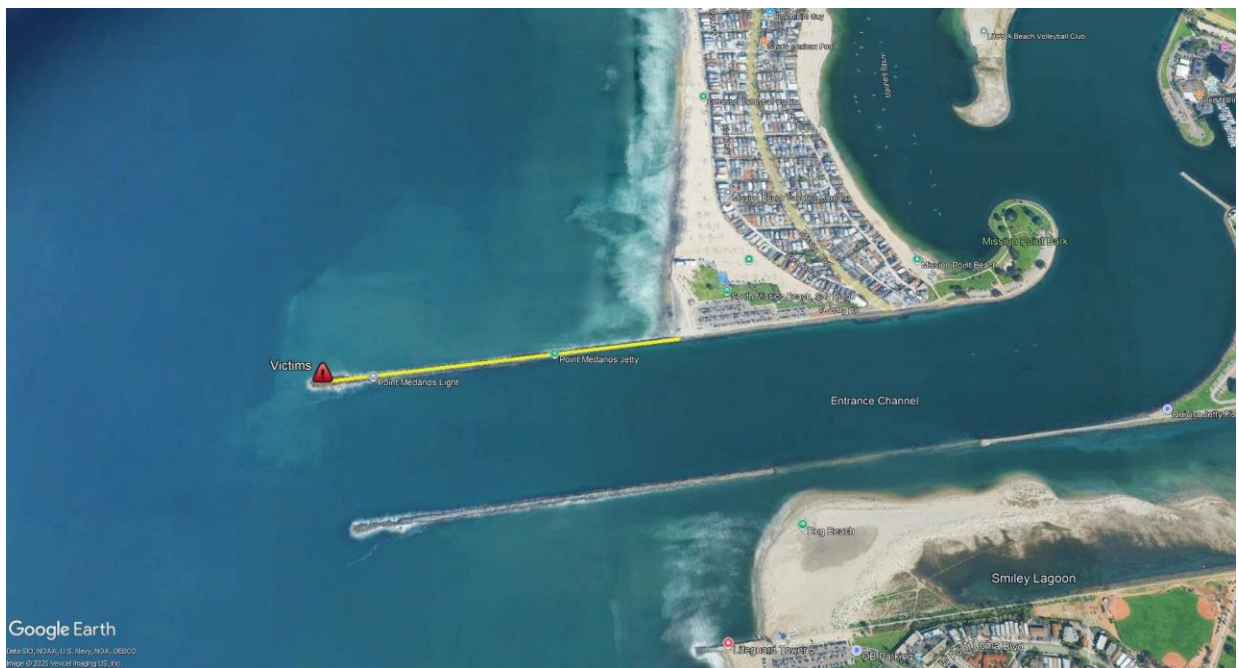


Pictures 4 & 5 – Static locations of LG Rescue Vessels, Insertion Points, and Victims





Pictures 6 & 7 - Overview of Jetty Walk Extraction (yellow)



.40 mile Jetty Walk

Video Link to SMB North Jetty Flyover

<https://youtu.be/z1nRoWRjrLQ>