

Historic Plover ferry complies with new Coast Guard regulations

BY JEREMY SCHWARTZ

The U.S. Coast Guard has had to alter its passenger weight regulations due to the increasing waistline of the average American.

Last December, the Coast Guard formally changed what's called the average weight per person a commercial passenger vessel must be able to carry from 160 pounds to 185. The reason?

"The average American weighs significantly more than the assumed weight per person utilized in current regulations," the federal regulation states.

Translation: The average American is getting heavier.

"To reflect the hamburger and cheese generation, I guess," Drayton Harbor Maritime founding director Richard Sturgill said with a laugh.

Some of Washington state's largest ferries had to reduce their maximum passenger limit due to the change, but Blaine's historic

Plover ferry actually gained capacity. The vessel, which Drayton Harbor Maritime maintains, can now legally carry 20 passengers, up from 18 since the vessel's last stability test.

Ordinarily, such stability tests are conducted once over the life of a vessel, Sturgill said. But due to regulation changes, passenger vessels across the state have had to go through additional stability tests or reduce passenger capacity.

Angela Gonzalez, a Coast Guard inspector who helped with the Plover's stability tests last week, said most larger vessel owners chose to voluntarily reduce their passenger capacity because stability tests can be quite complex. For the ferries plying the waters of Puget Sound, this would mean hundreds of thousands of pounds of weight needs to be lugged on board and positioned evenly throughout the vessel, Gonzalez explained.

"Sometimes you have to be creative to get that much weight on the vessel," she said.



◀ The Plover ferry undergoes stability testing last week in Blaine.

Photo by Richard Sturgill

For the Plover, volunteers helped pour about two tons of sand into 85 bags, each weighing 50 pounds each. The bags then had to be positioned at about waist height throughout the Plover so the bulk of the weight was not at deck level.

Once the weight was on the Plover, its new position in the water was marked and fed into mathematical formulas that determined the vessel's stability. The Plover

passed with flying colors, Gonzalez said, and was able to take on 400 more pounds than expected.

Sturgill said Mike and Steve Dodd donated the use of their crane at the Blaine Marina to help lift the sandbags onto the Plover. Friend-of-the-Plover and Blaine resident Tommy Ryser also turned out and, with other volunteers, spent hours helping load the weight onto the vessel, Sturgill added.

City lawsuit ...

(continued from page 1)

and motion in superior court seeking an injunction against WSDOT to halt further progress on the project until proper permits were obtained. This injunction was eventually thrown out, and the roundabout was completed in May 2010.

But on April 20, 2010, the lawsuit alleges, city staff sent a document to Bridge that should have been disclosed as part of the original request.

This document was a letter from WSDOT explaining what the roundabout project entailed, and Steve Banham, the city's public works director at the time, had signed off on it.

Blaine city manager Gary Tomsic said city staff came across this letter after Bridge and Schrader filed for an injunction against WSDOT. City staff showed the letter to Jon Sitkin, the city's attorney, and he said it should be given to Bridge.

"We got it to them as soon as we discovered it," Tomsic said.

Though the document was eventually sent, Bridge said he and Schrader had already incurred significant legal costs in trying to stop the roundabout from being built.

If city staff had given Bridge the

document initially, he would not have sued to stop the roundabout in the first place, saving him the legal costs.

Bridge's lawsuit asks the city pay \$15,988 in legal fees and be fined in accordance with state public records laws. State law says a public agency can be fined no more than \$100 for each day the agency delayed in completing a public records request.

Tomsic said he's not sure exactly what the city's official response to the lawsuit will be. City staff, in

conjunction with the city's lawyers, are still determining the validity and substance of the complaint.

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