

Surf Stations

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There is a declining number of Coast Guard Surf Stations due to staff shortages. To be called a surf station, the surf has to be greater than 8 feet for at least 10% (36 days) or greater each year. Most of the surf stations are on the west coast. There used to be two stations designated as surf station in Coast Guard District 1; Chatham and Merrimack River.

Surf stations need a 47 foot Motorized Life Boat (MLB). The MLB is self righting.



Surf stations also need trained crew. Surfmen is the terminology used to describe specially trained personnel to operate in rough weather. It is also currently the highest qualification in the United States Coast Guard for small boat operations. Coast Guard Surfmen are rated to operate the 47-foot MLB in its most extreme operating conditions after undergoing training at the National Motor Lifeboat School near the mouth of the Columbia River at Cape Disappointment. There are currently about 200 Surfmen in the Coast Guard and only about 500 have ever earned the designation.

The Chatham station was downgraded in 2021 for failing to meet the surf requirements. The Merrimack River station was downgraded in 2024 due to personnel shortages. It is hoped that the Merrimack River station can be regraded to a surf station when trained personnel become available.