

Coast Guard refuels in Point Arena during rescue

By Amie Windsor

United States Coast Guard rescue helicopters visited the Point Arena lighthouse three times Friday, Aug. 21, to refuel while searching for a missing abalone diver near Van Damme State Park.

The diver, Yoshihiro Ohhashi, 57, of Pleasanton, was visiting the coast with a friend. Both men entered the Pacific Ocean at Cobbler's Point in Little River to dive for abalone.

According to the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office, around 12:20 p.m. the friend became ill from the rough ocean conditions and left the water. He lost sight of Ohhashi while climbing to the

top of the bluff, and when he reached the top, he could see only Ohhashi's overturned flotation device, according to Capt. Greg Van Patten. The friend ran to Van Damme State Park and contacted emergency services.

The United States Coast Guard — which touched down in Point Arena — along with the Mendocino Volunteer Fire Department (MVFD), California State Parks, Mendocino County Sheriff's Office and Mendocino County Search and Rescue carried out the search effort.

The search continued through the afternoon and was suspended when darkness

came, with arrangements made to resume the following morning.

The next day around noon, MVFD divers located Ohhashi's body. The cause of death was not obvious at the time the body was recovered. A coroner's investigation was initiated and the cause of death is pending upon completion of an autopsy and toxicology screening. Ohhashi was the seventh abalone diver to die this season along the North Coast.

For several years, the Coast Guard has maintained an emergency jet fuel depot at the Point Arena Lighthouse to support search and rescue

See Coast Guard...

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cases along the southern Mendocino coast. A team of Coast Guard auxiliarists, including Ken Reynoldson, Chris Jewell, Ed Secco and Glenn Funk, maintains the fuel. They recirculate and test the fuel weekly for contamination and are available 24/7 to help refuel the helicopters.