



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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N.C. Coastal Management To Begin Inventory of Coastal Sandbag Structures

RALEIGH – The N.C. Division of Coastal Management this week will begin a detailed inventory of sandbag structures protecting oceanfront property in North Carolina. The inventory will be used to prioritize the removal of certain sandbag structures that are subject to a May 2008 removal date.

A N.C. Coastal Resources Commission rule passed in 2000 allowed property owners in communities actively pursuing beach nourishment to keep their sandbags for five years from the date of installation or until May 1, 2008, whichever is later. With that deadline imminent, the Division of Coastal Management understands that oceanfront property owners have some questions about this rule and what must happen to their sandbag structures in May.

Affected property owners are those with sandbag permits whose homes are located in communities that were actively seeking beach nourishment as of Oct. 1, 2001. The Coastal Area Management Act permit authorizing the sandbag structure for a given property specifies the date when the sandbags must be removed.

“I want to stress that the May deadline does not affect every sandbag on the coast,” said Jim Gregson, director of the Division of Coastal Management. “Nor are we banning sandbags in North Carolina. This action affects a certain subset of structures – approximately 150 of the 370 total sandbag structures in North Carolina – that in many instances have been in place much longer than the 2-year to 5-year time frame in which they are normally allowed. The division will take a phased approach to enforcing this deadline, beginning with the sandbag inventory.”

Sandbags that are covered with both sand and stable, natural vegetation will be allowed to remain in place until such time as they are uncovered by a storm or other event. The DCM inventory will determine which sandbag structures can remain and which must be removed. DCM will notify by mail property owners whose sandbags are subject to removal. Property owners will have 30 days from the notification date to remove the sandbags from their property.

The Coastal Resources Commission’s sandbag rules were written to allow property owners to temporarily protect imminently threatened oceanfront structures. The CRC limits the amount of time that sandbags may be used to protect a structure, because the commission must also protect access to the public beach. Sandbags that are left in place too long can block beach access. Sandbags also can be harmful to the nesting habitats of endangered species, such as sea turtles. Over time, sandbags actually can worsen erosion at neighboring properties. When this happens, sandbags become as harmful as the seawalls the state has banned since 1985.

Once the inventory is complete, property owners who are notified to remove their sandbags may apply for a variance from the CRC to keep the bags in place. Visit the Division of Coastal Management’s web site at <http://www.nccoastalmanagement.net/Permits/forms.htm> to learn more about filing a variance request.

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