

Group wants artificial reefs to foster

By ANDY GOTLIEB
Tribune Staff Writer

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BERNANDO BEACH — The county's Port Authority plans to play a few war games soon, followed by some Reef Ball.

Reef Ball isn't the latest nightclub attraction or a half-baked professional sport. And the war games don't involve live ammunition, although M-60 tanks are involved.

Instead, the port authority wants to use the tanks and Reef Balls — round concrete

creations — for two new artificial reefs it is developing, said Linda Roland, the agency's artificial reef program coordinator and executive secretary.

"We have very large recreational boating public — divers and fishermen," Roland said. "This is enhancement."

The state Department of Environmental Protection has written two \$50,000 grants to help the county install the artificial reefs. The money comes from saltwater fishing license revenue, said Jon Dodrill, an envi-

ronmental administrator in the department's fisheries management sector.

"The intent is to compare (the durability of) materials," Dodrill said, adding that the county lacks the resources of some others. "They just don't have the infrastructure to operate independently, so we felt the two pilot projects would be appropriate out there."

The outdated tanks will make up the first reef, Roland said. The Army plans to bring eight tanks by barge from Alabama

on Dec. 18 or 19 off Bernardo Beach, creating an artificial reef.

Meantime, the possibility of a Reef Balls, Roland Group presentation at monthly meeting.

Barber's Artificial Reef J

Tanks, reef balls wanted to boost sea life

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pumpkin-shaped hollow concrete balls. The rough surface contains numerous holes to allow water and marine life to pass through or cling. Engineering makes them stable in rough waters, while preventing them from sinking into the sand. Groups of Reef Balls, which come in three sizes, are placed together to form artificial reefs. The largest Reef Ball is 6 feet high, 4 feet wide and weighs 3,000 to 6,000 pounds.

"It provides a home for the fish

and also a food source because it attracts the small bait fish," Roland said. "It's like a habitat for fish."

Barber said he used his extensive diving background in developing the product.

"I knew a little bit about what seemed to attract life and what didn't," he said.

The port authority is stepping up its artificial reef program, which dates to the late 1970s. In 1978, the Albert R. Richardson Reef was placed 13.25 nautical miles off Bernardo Beach in about 47 feet of water. It is made up of concrete from the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, con-

crete culverts and concrete-encased tires.

The Jim Champion Reef was built in 1979 out of concrete culverts and a steel barge hull. It sits 17 nautical miles northwest of the Bernardo Beach water tower in 20 feet of water.

"We were pulling old culverts out there and it was working pretty well," Roland said, noting salt water's corrosive action. "Those were the best materials of the time."

Reef Balls are specially designed to last about 500 years, Barber said. The concrete includes strengthening fibers, he said.

The two new reefs to them from shore than the reefs, Roland said. The blessed with large patch grass that provide cover for life. Artificial reefs may placed on sandy-bottomed

The use of artificial reefs specially to replace damaged washed-away coral reefs grown rapidly in recent years. According to a Department of Environmental Protection poll From 1988 to 1991, 120 stalled off Florida's coast compared to 81 between 1983 and 36 between 1980 and 1