

[<=Back](#)



The Standard-Times

@dline

Creating a home for marine life

Odd-looking objects form artificial reef in Dartmouth

By Jack Stewardson, Standard-Times staff writer

DARTMOUTH -- Slowly, gingerly, the huge 35-ton hydraulic crane aboard a Linberg Marine Inc. barge lifted one of the weird-looking, sawed-off-whiffle ball-like contraptions off the deck and gently set it down in waters off Salters Point yesterday.

It was being lowered 30 feet to the sea bottom, where it will become part of an artificial reef designed to make fish feel right at home.

"We've got the first 20 reef balls in and we're setting up for the pallets now," said Larry Beggs, a representative of Reef Innovations and Diving Specialists Inc. of Florida and the Reef Ball Development Group Inc. of Georgia, which molded about 80 reef units earlier this month at the Fairhaven shipyard.

"Finally," said Paul Diodati, sports fisheries program manager with the State Division of Marine Fisheries, who has been waiting nearly two years for the effort to enhance fish stocks to get off the ground.

"It's a great site," he added. "A perfect site."

Linberg Marine is deploying the 1½-ton reef balls and the smaller, 1,300 to 1,500 pound pallet balls to create an artificial habitat at the bottom of a 3.5-acre site off Salters Point. The company deployed about 45 of the units yesterday, and hopes to complete the work today.

"The goal is to create additional habitat for marine life," said Rep. William M. Straus, D-Mattapoissett, who got \$75,000 appropriated through the Legislature to set up the program.



Fish like to congregate around the structures, which soon become encrusted with vegetation and invertebrates, creating a habitat for species such as scup, black sea bass, and tautog, which seek out bottom areas for food and shelter. Lobsters also are likely to be attracted to the area, along with secondary users such as striped bass and bluefish.

"This place is going to be a big scup area next year," predicted Lt. Peter Hanlon of the state environmental police. A 25-foot patrol boat and UMass Dartmouth's Lucky Lady ferried the state officials, Reps. Straus and John Quinn, D-Dartmouth, and reporters out to watch the placement of the reef units.

The project is a joint undertaking of the state Division of Marine Fisheries and the UMass Dartmouth Center for Marine Science and Technology.

"There is real potential in education, real potential in research, and I believe real potential for economic development," said Dr. Peter H. Cressy, chancellor of UMass Dartmouth.

"It's another way station for us to gather data," he added. "It should give us some real good science, and not by guess or by God."

Karen Rypka, coordinator of the project for the state Division of Marine Fisheries, said the concrete reef balls and pallets have proven "to be the best type for reef materials."

"Tires have been proven over the years not to be the best reef material," she said. "Bundled together, they have a tendency to get blown apart in a storm."

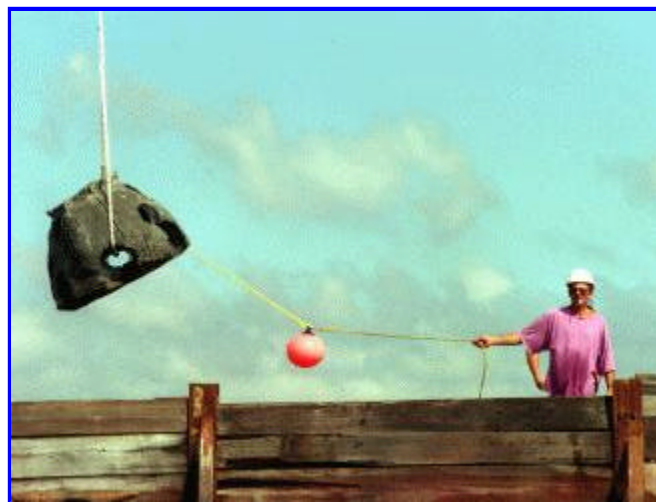
Divers are expected to check the configuration next week, she said. "This time of year, however, the visibility is a little tough in Buzzards Bay."

The artificial reef was being laid with a cluster of 20 balls laid at the center, with the smaller pallet balls in perimeter groupings. Some of the larger balls will be laid outside the site.

The concrete contains micro silica for added strength, is resistant to abrasives and has a pH content similar to natural seawater. The reef balls, weighing 3,000 to 3,500 pounds each, are about 4 feet high and 6 feet in diameter. Reef pallets weigh 1,200 to 1,400 pounds and are about 3 feet high and 4 feet in diameter.

"We're going to start monitoring this site on a regular monthly basis, and also work with the Mass. Division of Marine Fisheries," said Jeff Turner, the UMass Dartmouth scientist who has spent 10 years collecting data on things such as water chemistry and plankton at various sites in Buzzards Bay.

Mr. Diodati said the state hopes the information gathered from the Salters Point reef will allow the state to expand the program in the future.



"We hope to develop a second project or expand the project here in Buzzards Bay," he said. "I'd like to see one more project in Buzzards Bay or in some other area of state waters,"

He said the state might be able to use fisheries restoration funds it receives through the federal Wallop-Breault Fund to expand the project.

Staff photos by Hank Seaman

(Top to bottom): 1) Reef balls on a barge will be lowered into the site off Salters Point in Dartmouth. 2) One of the units is hoisted on a cable. 3) A crane lifts a reef ball off the barge. 4) From left, Rep.

William M. Straus, Paul Diodati of the Division of Marine Fisheries and Rep. John Quinn watch the procedure.

[<=Back](#)

-Home-	-Digest-	-Index-	-Staff-
------------------------	--------------------------	-------------------------	-------------------------

✉ Please mail any comments to Newsroom@S-T.com

