

Divers Find Heavy Reef Damage From Ship Grounding

Local 10 News
October 13, 2004

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. -- Environmental officials say a coral reef off the coast of Fort Lauderdale was heavily damaged when a freighter grounded last week.

"The area where the freighter went aground is pretty much, 100 percent destroyed," said Lou Fisher of Nova Southeastern University.

Divers say they found thousands of square feet of reef "bulldozed over and flattened." The Panamanian-flagged Federal Pescadores ran aground about one-half mile offshore October 6th after leaving Port Everglades with a load of cement bound for Port Canaveral. It was refloated Sunday.

Divers from Broward County's environmental department and Nova Southeastern University found coral smashed to rubble, barrel sponges sheared off at the base and sea fans snapped in two and buried in sand. The Coast Guard is investigating the accident.

The Broward County Department of Planning and Environmental Protection is still determining the formal damage assessment. The county and state Department of Environmental Protection could impose fines and require payment for restoration work.

A lawyer for the ship owner's insurance company says his company will cooperate with authorities in any work to repair or mitigate the damage.



A look underwater just off Fort Lauderdale where a 600-foot freighter ran aground uncovers serious damage to the reef there.



Broken coral and crushed rocks are just part of the trail of rubble.



The Federal Pescadores ran aground last week as it was trying to anchor before entering Port Everglades.



Tugboats towed the Pescadores off the reef Monday.



After the freighter was moved, divers from Nova Southeastern University's National Coral Reef Institute inspected the damage.



What they saw, broken coral heads, snapped sea fans and few fish, was not encouraging.



Some portions of the reef were "scraped clean," according to Lou Fisher of Nova Southeastern University.



What may look just like sand is really a buried reef. The freighter's props stirred up the sand, covering large parts of the reef.



This stretch of sand used to be reef.



There is no cost estimate yet as to how much damage the freighter caused to the reef.



The company that owns the freighter will likely have to pay the cost of reattaching what few corals may be saved.