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Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Project to Receive National Clean Air Excellence Award

Partners Currently Implementing a 2016 Program

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency next week will honor the partners behind the Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies project — which reduced ship speeds in the Santa Barbara Channel to cut air pollution and protect endangered whale species — with a national Clean Air Excellence Award. The Clean Air Excellence Awards recognize outstanding efforts to achieve cleaner air. The agencies and organizations who collaborated on this project are one of only a select number of honorees this year.

“Each of these award winners has taken real, tangible steps to improve public health in their communities by reducing air pollutants or greenhouse gases,” said Janet McCabe, acting assistant administrator for EPA’s Office of Air and Radiation. “These projects reflect the creativity and commitment of public and private sector organizations to make a difference and drive us toward a cleaner, healthier future.”

The project was recognized in the Community Action category, which applies to innovative community partnerships of diverse stakeholders. Said Aeron Arlin Genet, Air Pollution Control Officer at Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District, “This award is a great recognition of our partnership, and of how much we can accomplish when we find common ground.” Chris Mobley, Superintendent of Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary added, “This national honor for our initiative is exciting, and will help bring attention to our efforts to craft innovative solutions.”

Reducing ship speeds to 12 knots or lower greatly reduces air pollution and the risk of fatal ship strikes on whales. In 2014, project partners and award recipients Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District (SBCAPCD), Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary (CINMS), Environmental Defense Center (EDC), Ventura County Air Pollution Control District (VCAPCD), and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF) implemented a Vessel Speed Reduction (VSR) incentive trial program in the Santa Barbara Channel. Seven global shipping companies participated, and the Trial slowed 27 ship transits in the Channel to 12 knots or less for an incentive payment to the shipping companies of \$2500 per transit, cutting more than 12 tons of smog-forming nitrogen oxides pollution and more than 500 metric tons of greenhouse gases.

Said Mike Villegas, VCAPCD Air Pollution Control Officer, “We appreciate EPA’s recognition of our efforts to reduce emissions from marine shipping operations, as these vessels are a significant source of emissions in our

jurisdictions.” EDC’s Executive Director Owen Bailey added, “We are grateful for the recognition of this unique project that combines conservation benefits by not only improving air quality but also protecting endangered whales.”

The 2014 Trial was followed by a yearlong effort in 2015 by the Marine Shipping Working Group under the CINMS Advisory Council to develop strategies to further reduce air pollution and protect whales in the region. In its final report to the Council, the Working Group expressed unanimous support for a second VSR incentive program, and partners are currently implementing a 2016 program funded by SBCAPCD, NMSF, the Volgenau Family Foundation, and VCAPCD (anticipated partner).

The 2016 Program will include new elements such as: sliding-scale incentives targeting the fastest ships; identification of a second VSR Zone south of the Channel Islands; an opportunity for ship captains to submit detailed reports of whale sightings from their transits; and more.

Said NMSF Interim President and CEO Ted Lillestolen, “It’s wonderful to receive this award as we are in the midst of implementing a larger scale 2016 program - which we hope will continue to have a lasting impact for the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and the surrounding community.”

For more information, visit <http://www.ourair.org/air-pollution-marine-shipping/>. Descriptions of each agency and organization receiving the Clean Air Excellence Award follow.

The **Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District** is a local government agency that works to protect the people and the environment of Santa Barbara County from the effects of air pollution. More information is available at www.OurAir.org.

NOAA’s Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1980 to protect marine resources surrounding San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa and Santa Barbara islands. The sanctuary spans approximately 1,470 square miles, extending from island shorelines to six miles offshore, and encompasses a rich diversity of marine life, habitats and historical and cultural resources. Learn more at <http://channelislands.noaa.gov/contact/welcome.html>.

The **Environmental Defense Center**, a non-profit law firm, protects and enhances the local environment through education, advocacy, and legal action and works primarily within Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties. Since 1977, EDC has empowered community based organizations to advance environmental protection. Program areas include protecting and enhancing clean water, the Santa Barbara Channel, protecting open spaces and wildlife, and climate and energy. Learn more about EDC at www.EnvironmentalDefenseCenter.org.

The **Ventura County Air Pollution Control District** is the local government agency in Ventura County that protects public health and agriculture from the adverse effects of air pollution by identifying air pollution problems and developing a comprehensive program to achieve and maintain state and federal air quality standards. More information is available at www.vcapcd.org.

For everyone who loves the ocean and wants to ensure its healthy future, America’s National Marine Sanctuaries and the **National Marine Sanctuary Foundation**, working together, are delivering real solutions and measurable results. A private, non-profit organization, NMSF plays a vital role in the work of the coast-to-coast US sanctuary system through support of research and conservation, education, citizen science, outreach and community engagement. NMSF is also a respected advocate for ocean awareness and protection with policymakers nationally and worldwide. Learn more at marinesanctuary.org.