

Cutter Storis Gets Closer Look by Mexican Authorities

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The retired Coast Guard Cutter Storis is back in the news, though it helps if you know Spanish to read about it. The once-longest serving cutter in the U.S. Coast Guard was written up in an Ensenada, Mexico, newspaper, first for a raid by government officials over a potential radiation threat, and then for PCB contamination. The ship is tied up in Ensenada after being bought at auction and towed to Mexico to be broken up for scrap metal.

After a fire broke out aboard the floating processor Bering Star, which was tied up on the same pier as the Storis in the harbor operated by Infrastructure and Port Services, Mexican officials last month inspected the old cutter after receiving a report that it may contain radioactive material onboard.

It turned out that there was none, but the Mexican environmental protection agency acted on persistent reports that the Storis has polychlorinated biphenyls and asbestos that could escape if the ship were scrapped.

Former crewmen of the Storis and supporters of a preservation group wishing to turn the cutter into a floating museum, have long contended the ship left the country illegally, because it contained hazardous waste that, under international law, cannot be exported. Instead, if it is to be scrapped, it must be broken up in the country of origin – in this case, the United States.

Jon Ottman is a preservationist who spoke with KMXT in October about the ship's potential contamination issues.

“Because the GSA listed the vessel as a repairable ship and did not indicate in their original listing for her on the GSA auction site that she contained hazardous materials that would have to be handled in a special fashion, or that should she be desired by someone for ship-breaking, that it would have to be done domestically,” Ottman said. “Those are all very serious shortcomings in the original General Services auction listing.”

According to the Ensenada newspaper online, Mexican authorities are conducting laboratory tests on material from the Storis to determine if it contaminates exceed dangerous levels.