

Shark attack rattles coastal merchants

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Reactions range from confidence to concern

Coastal North County's businesses face a big unknown in the aftermath of Friday's fatal shark attack at Fletcher Cove in Solana Beach.

People have been advised to stay out of the water at North County beaches from Del Mar to South Carlsbad State Beach over what otherwise would have been a very busy weekend. Officials posted signs warning people to stay out of the water through Monday at beaches from La Jolla to south Carlsbad.

For businesses, the question is whether those kept out

of the water will also stay out of stores, and if so, for how long. Businesses and individuals interviewed gave a variety of answers, from confidence to concern.

North County's tourism industry trade group, the San Diego North Convention & Visitors Bureau, supported the beach closure as a prudent safety measure.

"First of all, we're most concerned about the safety of our guests," said Cami Mattson, the bureau's president and chief executive. "I think the good news is that the beaches are being shut down and mon-

itored. ... You don't want over-reaction, but on the other hand, I expect caution."

Mattson said she didn't want to minimize the fatality, but said it's important to remember that such an attack is "unusual and rare and doesn't go along with any of the typical shark patterns."

She said her group and the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau, the main tourism trade group for the county, are working together to gather information and get it to the public.

If it were a less tragic event, the flock of television

vans with antennas extended skyward at Fletcher Cove would have been great promotional vehicles for the area's Chamber of Commerce weather.

Apparently unconcerned youths played volleyball and girls rode on swings at Fletcher Cove's park.

But nobody was below on the beach itself. The stairway to the beach was blocked with yellow police tape.

Fred Moreno, a tourist from Scottsdale, Ariz., looked at the scene and asked a North



BRADLEY J. FIKES / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

At Moonlight Beach in Encinitas, some people ignore the warnings about a shark and wade into the water.

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County Times reporter what had happened.

"I won't be going back in the water," Moreno said after he was told about the attack, which officials believe came from a great white shark.

Moreno said he was staying in a nearby vacation rental and would spend the rest of his vacation at places other than the beach.

Two blocks inland at the Surf & Saddle, manager Willie Gonzales said there were fewer customers at his bar than normal on a Friday afternoon.

"They're all down there" at Fletcher Cove, Gonzales said.

During the day, most of the patrons are retired, but on weekends, the crowd includes beachgoers, Gonzales said.

If there's a prolonged beach closure, "I don't know what's going to happen," he

said.

Surf & Saddle patron Judy Zamora of Carlsbad concurred that the near-empty bar usually had many more people on a Friday afternoon.

The mood was better at Solo, an interior design store in the Cedros Design District. Owner Carole Carden said business appeared to be normal.

"We're having a sale, so it's hard to tell," Carden said.

"I'm sure there won't be as many swimmers as usual," Carden said. "Let's hope there are as many shoppers as usual."

Surfride, a Solana Beach surf shop, hadn't noticed any fall off in business, manager Steve Stermon said.

"It's the slow season," Stermon said.

Up the coast in Encinitas, Hansen's Surfboards sales manager Christian Hansen predicted that any drop-off in customers or in beachgoing would be minimal. The risk from shark attack is extreme-

ly low, he said, and doesn't make him feel afraid.

"I'd go in today," said Hansen as he was stocking clothes.

Hansen said the beach closure was so extensive that it would be impossible to enforce, except for "the Pillbox," as locals refer to Fletcher Cove.

"It's like trying to close down North County," Hansen said. "You can't keep the kids out of D Street Beach ... there's not enough people (to enforce the closure)."

And that was the case at Moonlight Beach just to the north of D Street, where about a half-dozen people were wading, including two girls with Hula-Hoops. About 200 people were on the beach itself, with nearly 20 playing volleyball near a closed life-guard tower.

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