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NSY LONG BEACH
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Navy says shipyard is at risk

By Neil Strassman
Staff writer

Although alternative base-closing scenarios are in the works, the Navy confirmed Thursday that it is seriously considering another proposal to shut the Long Beach Naval Shipyard.

Closing the shipyard, which employs 3,100 workers, is included in each of three scenarios Navy officials have been circulating. They will make final recommendations about which bases to close in 1995, and also have targeted the naval shipyard in Portsmouth, Maine.

"The fact they do appear (in the scenarios) means there is some interest in closure," said Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy Charlie Nemfakos, vice chairman of the Navy's base structure evaluation committee in Washington, D.C.

The Navy will decide which bases to propose for closure by early January, Nemfakos said. The Navy's proposal will be forwarded to the secretary of defense, who prepares a base list for the federal Base Closure and Realignment Commission. The commission in turn issues a final list of bases recommended for closure.

Because the base closure commission has in the past followed service recommendations, shipyard supporters fear that if the Navy proposes closing the Long Beach site, it will scuttle all chances to keep the facility open.

"This is a wake-up call to the community and the shipyard's local and regional suppliers to come forward and get involved in the Save Our Shipyard committee," said Henry Taboada, assistant city manager.

Large companies such as the Southern California Edison Co. and the Southern California Gas Co. have joined the SOS, he said,

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but the small contractors who have the most to lose must do the same. Workers at the shipyard are donating 95 cents from each paycheck to SOS.

Today, Mayor Beverly O'Neill will preview the city's nine-point strategy for saving the shipyard and release a city-commissioned study that estimates the shipyard contributes \$757 million in annual spending to the area's economy and supports about 10,100 jobs in the region.

"To the Navy, we will make the best case we can about the cost-effectiveness of keeping the shipyard open," Taboada said.

The Navy's base evaluation committee is looking at 835 Navy and Marine Corps facilities in the United States and abroad, Nemfakos said.

"These are some of the scenarios," he said, of the three proposals that include shutting Long Beach. "There are more to follow. We are not halfway through putting scenarios out for the entire Department of the Navy."

Other scenarios to be developed cover the fate of naval stations, naval air bases, training com-

mands, communication commands and other parts of the Navy, as well as more proposals on shipyards.

Unlike the 1991 and 1993 base-closure rounds, Nemfakos said, groups with representatives from all the services are "looking across the Department of Defense" at making cuts and consolidating maintenance and repair, pilot training, medical care, scientific laboratories and test and evaluation sites.

The Navy's focus now is to put out scenarios for those units, he said, and that is why the shipyard scenarios were issued.

Still to be done is a cost analysis of shutting each facility. It includes everything from severance pay to moving tons of equipment and the relocation of people, as well as other base-closure costs.

"Some bases don't cost much to close and pay off big-time by getting people off the government payroll. Some don't pay off," Nemfakos said.

In previous years, he said, the base closure commission has taken into consideration the value of having a public shipyard such as Long Beach near a major fleet

concentration, such as San Diego, where the Navy has most of its West Coast ships homeported.

"That has been a reason we have kept Long Beach open," he said, adding that in each of the last two base-closing rounds, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the commission that it not close Long Beach.

In 1993, the Navy did not recommend closing the shipyard, but it was added to the list of bases to be closed by the commission. It narrowly escaped closure in a 4-3 vote.

The large dry dock at the shipyard that can accommodate an aircraft carrier, one of two on the West Coast, has also played a role in keeping the yard open. A proposal is under consideration to build a new large dry dock in San Diego.

"If a determination is made we need such a thing (another large

dry dock), the cost of building such a dock would play a role in whether Long Beach is closed," Nemfakos said.

Scenarios, dry docks, commissions and working groups: It all boils down to jobs in an economy already hard hit by recession, and the shipyard workers are organizing to keep the yard open.

This weekend workers are heading to shopping malls to get residents to sign letters to President Bill Clinton and members of Congress urging them not to close the shipyard. They want to send 10,000 letters to Washington.

"People are fighting for their jobs," said Mike Patterson, vice president of the Federal Employees Metal Trades Council, an umbrella organization of shipyard unions. "We have all the malls covered with volunteers. It's so important."