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| DAVID KARP [dkarp@tc.canwest.com](mailto:dkarp@tc.canwest.com)

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# The dirty dozen: Gorge's derelict boats

A growing collection of boats in the Gorge waterway poses a threat to the environment and should be removed, community members say.

Roughly a dozen boats — some boarded up or with tarps covering holes — sit anchored in the waters near Banfield Park in Victoria West. Barry Hobbis, managing director of Victoria Harbour Ferries, said a number of the boats are derelict, including some that have sunk and been refloated.

"I've seen what I know to be diesel in a sheen coming from one boat and leaving a trail," he said. "And on another occasion [I saw] what I think to be gasoline. I've seen human waste floating by as well."

The boats started collecting about two years ago and have ballooned over the last year. In November, 46-year-old Victor Greek died after the boat he was on flipped. Greek's boat had been moored in the Gorge for several months.

At the time, Victoria police chief Jamie Graham said the police investigation would address how to deal with the boats. But police spokesman Sgt. Grant Hamilton said the police can't do much.

"This is an issue the city needs to be involved in, and work with Transport Canada in regards to who has authority to impound those derelict vessels," he said.

City of Victoria bylaw officials have been posting notices on boats docked near the park ordering them to leave, but once boats move farther into the Gorge waterway, they become the responsibility of the federal government.

Hobbis said Transport Canada should see that the boats are removed. Diane Carr, a board member with the Victoria West Community Association, agrees.

"This is like allowing people to go in and camp in Beacon Hill Park, and leave their trailers behind," she said. "That wouldn't be allowed by the authorities."

Transport Canada investigated complaints about the boats in May and found they weren't breaking any rules.

Unless they are preventing other vessels from getting through the waterway, the federal government can't order the boats to be removed.

"They didn't find any significant obstructions to navigation," said Transport Canada spokeswoman Jillian Glover. "We don't really have legal grounds to take action on a vessel just because it doesn't look good, unfortunately."

But Hobbis said Transport Canada could take action if it wanted, since the vessels make navigation through the Gorge more challenging.

"The bottom line is that this is ridiculous," he said. "There will be a disaster, and somebody will say, 'Why didn't Transport Canada do something?'"

"It's an abrogation of a reasonable responsibility to the community and hiding behind a set of regulations that don't clearly define when a danger occurs."

Keith Rosene, who lives near Banfield Park and is looking after one of the anchored boats for its owners, said concerns about the boats are unfounded.

"There have been quite a few misadventures in the Gorge with the boats of late — that's true," said Rosene. "Let's face it — there is always the risk of spillage. But with most of these boats, they have little or no fuel in them."

He said many of the boats belong to low-income individuals, but all are being looked after.

"Certainly, all these boats are a little outside the norm in terms of trying to find an anchorage that's affordable them," Rosene said. "It's a nice safe place to anchor. They don't have to be worried about winds or tide changes."

Other areas around Greater Victoria have had problems with derelict boats in recent years, including Sooke Harbour and Tod Inlet.

Hobbis is running for Sonya Chandler's vacated city council seat, but said his decision to speak out is unrelated to the election.

"It's not an issue for me politically," he said. "This has been a year-and-a-half passion for me and for many people on the harbour."



Hobbis created a video of the boats, which can be viewed at [youtube.com](http://youtube.com) by searching for "derelict and abandoned vessels."

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