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High surf — and warnings — hit area

WEATHER: Lifeguards say it's no time for amateurs to go into the water.

By Kristin S. Agostoni Staff Writer

As massive waves pummeled the South Bay shoreline Wednesday, lifeguards warned would-be beachgoers that they could be no match for the strong surf.

The big waves were building throughout the day, with faces measuring an estimated 10 to 20 feet by late afternoon in Manhattan Beach. "It's extremely hazardous," said

Los Angeles County lifeguards Section Chief Garth Canning, who counted few surfers around that time in the Manhattan area. "If anyone even thinks of going in the water, they should talk to a lifeguard before entering."

The National Weather Service's high surf advisory for county beaches remains in effect until 9 a.m. Friday.

The big surf is the result of a "very large westerly swell" that spread across coastal waters Wednesday morning and was expected to subside slowly by late today, forecasters said.

The National Weather Service predicted the surf would reach 8 to 12 feet, with local sets as high as 14 feet, at west-facing beaches.

Canning, who had been monitoring water conditions at various sites along the coast, said the surf had become bigger and more dangerous in the afternoon, when the winds were blowing and sets of waves were "more than double over head."

Outside the lifeguards' Hermosa Beach station and at the popular surfing spot near the Redondo Beach breakwater, people seemed to be heeding the warnings, he said. Can-

SURF A14



A wave launches a surfer from his board south of the Manhattan Beach Pier on Wednesday as heavy surf pounded local beaches.

Robert Casillas Staff Photographer

RBUSD to add Jewish holidays

SCHOOLS: Taking Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur off avoids fund losses due to absences.

By Douglas Morino Staff Writer

Troubled by the loss of state funds due to soaring student absences on Jewish holy days, the Redondo Beach school board has approved new district holidays for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

The September observances, which mark the beginning and end of the High Holy Days in the Jewish religion, will be added to the Redondo Beach Unified School District calendar next year.

"We're seeing an increase in the number of students missing school on these days," Assistant Superintendent Nancy Billinger said during a packed school board meeting Tuesday.

On Yom Kippur this school year, the district recorded 208 more student absences than the daily average, costing the district \$7,500 in funding. Redondo Beach Unified receives about \$36 in per-pupil daily attendance funding.

"The financial component is compelling and should be considered," said Rabbi Mark Hyman of Congregation Tikvat Jacob in Manhattan Beach. "But as our community becomes more diverse, I think

HOLIDAYS A14

Thousands feared dead



Thony Belizaire AFP/Getty Images

Haitians wander through the rubble of buildings in Port-au-Prince, above, on Wednesday, one day after a magnitude-7 earthquake devastated the impoverished nation's capital.

Planeloads of rescuers and emergency supplies headed to Haiti as governments and aid agencies launched a massive relief operation.

At right, people search for survivors Wednesday under the rubble of a collapsed building in Port-au-Prince.

The earthquake flattened the president's palace, the cathedral, hospitals, schools, the main prison and whole neighborhoods.

Ricardo Arduengo The Associated Press



HAITI: Quake leaves bodies strewn about Port-au-Prince, up to 3 million needing aid.

By Jonathan M. Katz The Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Dazed survivors wandered past dead bodies in rubble-covered streets Wednesday, crying for loved ones, and rescuers searched collapsed buildings as officials feared the death toll from Haiti's devastating earthquake could reach into the tens of thousands.

The first cargo planes with food, water, medical supplies, shelter and sniffer dogs headed to the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation a day after the magnitude-7 quake flattened much of the capital of 2 million people.

Tuesday's earthquake brought down buildings great and small — from shacks in shantytowns to President Rene Preval's gleaming white National Palace, where a dome tilted ominously above the manicured grounds.

Hospitals, schools and the

HAITI A16

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- Haiti quake had been predicted for years. **A9**
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Sergeant won't face charges in hit-and-run

TORRANCE: Officer admitted he fled off-duty crash because alcohol impaired his judgment.

By Denise Nix Staff Writer

A Torrance police sergeant will not be charged in an off-duty hit-and-run collision, although he admitted he fled because his "judgment was impaired by alcohol," according to prosecutors.

Redondo Beach City Prosecutor Brenda Wells said Tuesday she declined to file a

criminal case against Sgt. Michael Mastick for several reasons.

Among them, Wells said, was the fact that the alleged victim did not want the internal affairs investigator prosecuted. In addition, she said, the driver of the suspect vehicle was not identified by any witnesses at the time of the Sept. 26 incident.

However, she noted: "Initially, Michael Mastick claimed that his wife was driving and she confirmed that information. Later, Michael Mastick submitted a state-

ment claiming that he was the driver and he fled because his judgment was impaired by alcohol."

Torrance police Lt. Bernard Anderson said Wednesday that there is an open personnel investigation into the matter, but declined to comment further.

Mastick's attorney did not return a telephone call seeking comment.

The Inglewood Police Department investigated the incident to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. A public

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