

# Coast Guard Buoy Tender Departs San Francisco for Major Maintenance Period



The Coast Guard Cutter Aspen (WLB 208) departs the San Francisco Bay Area Nov. 29. The Aspen served the California coastline since Sept. 28, 2001. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Taylor Bacon*

ALAMEDA, Calif. – The Coast Guard Cutter Aspen (WLB 208) and crew departed the Bay Area Nov. 29 for the last time as a San Francisco-based cutter and are en route to the Coast Guard Yard in Baltimore to undergo major maintenance and overhaul, the Coast Guard 11th District said Nov. 30.

This marks the end of two decades of service along the California Coastline for the Aspen as one of 16 of the nation's Juniper class sea-going buoy tenders. The 225-foot ship and its 48-person crew have been stationed at Yerba Buena

Island since Sept. 28, 2001.

Aspen's area of responsibility encompassed the coastal areas from the Oregon-California border to San Diego. In addition to its primary buoy tender operations, the cutter also has a long history in search and rescue, drug and migrant interdiction and marine pollution prevention and response missions. Since 2005, the cutter has worked with U.S. partners in Mexico to interdict tens of millions of dollars in illicit narcotics in support of U.S. Southern Command and Joint Interagency Task Force South objectives, most recently interdicting \$3.2 million worth of cocaine in 2017. In 2007, Aspen responded to the Cosco Busan oil spill in San Francisco and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 to assist in oil spill cleanup efforts.

The crew is slated to travel approximately 6,000 miles over the course of 40 days and pass from the Pacific to the Atlantic by way of the Panama Canal. The Aspen is scheduled to undergo a \$20 million, 12-month major maintenance availability (MMA) overhaul.

The MMA is a planned dry dock event at the Coast Guard Yard, the first such major availability in the life of this class of ship. The availability will recapitalize many of the ship's critical systems, to include complete crane replacement, topside preservation work and technology modernization. The availability is designed to ensure that the cutter can reach its designed 30-year service life. Aspen will be the 11th 225-foot Juniper Class buoy tender to begin the MMA period.

The Coast Guard Cutter Alder (WLB 216) formerly homeported in Duluth, Minnesota, is slated to be brought back into service in summer of 2022 by the former Aspen crew and re-homeported in San Francisco. The Aspen's scheduled final destination will be Homer, Alaska, in early 2023.

“It has been a privilege to serve along California’s rugged, oftentimes austere coastline; the beauty is without parallel, and the Pacific Ocean’s winds, current, fog and constant swells offshore continue to mold us as the stern teachers they are,” said Lt. Cmdr. Paul Ledbetter, the Aspen’s commanding officer. “The U.S. is and always has been a maritime nation, and my crew relishes the challenges of keeping the maritime transportation system up and running in our capacity as a WLB. We look forward to continuing to serve this great country when we return to San Francisco aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Alder next year.”

Coast Guard Aids to Navigation Team San Francisco will be standing by to perform routine maintenance on the Aspen’s buoys throughout the Bay Area. Additionally, the Coast Guard Cutter George Cobb, a 175-foot buoy tender homeported in San Pedro, is slated to maintain all aids to navigation south of San Francisco and the Coast Guard Cutter Elm, a 225-foot buoy tender homeported in Astoria, Oregon, is also slated to assist throughout Northern California in spring 2022.