

Economic Impacts: Gauging the Wind

Rhode Island's 420 miles of coastline make marine trades one of the state's most important economic sectors. Marine trade industries in Rhode Island encompass everything from auto imports, to commercial fishing, to boatbuilding and marinas and more.

Like other industries in Rhode Island, marine trades facilities are vulnerable to many aspects of climate change. Changes like sea level rise and an increase in extreme weather events could mean more damages to structures, more days of operational shutdowns, and big investments in storm protections.

Local Voices of Concern

William Ramos of Schulz Boat Company, Inc. observed, "less predictability to weather patterns affects day-to-day operations" and expressed concern about the potential impacts of high-speed winds on "boat yard operations, boat moving, and commissioning." Matt Calouro, Assistant Harbormaster for Bristol and Harbormaster of Warren, believes coastal erosion could be a serious consequence of sea level rise.

However, climate change has not yet had a significant enough effect on Rhode Island to drive adaptation

efforts in the marine trades industry. Nan Hall of Hall Spars & Rigging notes, "(R)ight now, the economy has affected our business a lot more than environment has." Similarly, Andrew Porter of Hinckley Yachts reports "no immediate concerns [regarding climate change] that would drive business decisions." This perspective could shift rapidly when Rhode Island takes a direct hit from a Superstorm Sandy.

Despite the acknowledgement that climate change will bring some challenges to the marine trades industry, adaptation to climate change is generally expected to have an overall positive result. Both Schulz Boat Company, Inc. and Hall Spars & Rigging noted that climate change could provide an increased demand for their products by extending the boating season. Although concerned about climate change, Blount Boats recognizes some benefits from the adaptation process. Julie Blount, Executive Vice President of Blount Boats, acknowledged, "(I)f [climate change] creates deeper water we would benefit because [Blount Boats'] shallow draft river location limits the types of vessels we can build." In addition, shorter winters would allow the company to extend its working season.



A fleet of pleasure craft moored behind Napatree Point in Westerly, Rhode Island