



## The Crime of Owning a Small Boat

From shore, you can see the bright-green violation notice stuck to the hull of the San Juan 21. Several other boats in the soon-to-be “public” mooring field in *Practical Sailor’s* home port of Sarasota, Fla., bear similar stickers.

The letter that the city mailed to the owner of the San Juan spells out the terms: Move the boat by Aug. 1, or it will be impounded and possibly destroyed.

It’s a familiar story. Burdened by a variety of “boat problems”—some real, some imagined—city officials move to further regulate the local harbor. Responsible boaters who’ve historically used the anchorage for free plead their case, but they are no match for the landlubber majority.

A common solution is the one Sarasota has chosen: Install a fee-based mooring field and force boaters to use it. Many such mooring fields

*Sailboat owners in Sarasota, Fla., are being asked to leave the city’s anchorage to make way for paid moorings.*

around the country are fairly priced, often administered by a government agency. In Sarasota’s case, the mooring enterprise is supposed to be run as a not-for-profit enterprise. The contractor, Jack Graham Inc., also has a controversial long-term lease to run the adjacent marina, Marina Jack. The proposed mooring rates are above the norm, making it hard to dismiss the accusation that the fees are inflated to “keep the riff-raff out.”

Some riff-raff. The owners of the San Juan are a middle-aged couple. He’s a professional yacht skipper, originally from Australia. She’s a former charterboat-crew who holds a U.S. Coast Guard captain’s license. The boat lets them spend time on the water with their two children, a 5-year-old boy and a 4-year-old girl.

The family lives in a small house adorned with buoys and liferings less than a mile from the anchorage. Money is tight. The San Juan 21 that they revived a few years back is one of their few luxuries. It gets used, not as much as they like, but enough to justify keeping it ... until now.

The city’s plan to introduce “first-rate services” and first-rate fees doesn’t allow boat owners on tight budgets much choice. Pay up, or move along.

If you’ve ever heard an Aussie rant about over-regulation, then you can imagine the skipper’s reaction

when asked about the sticker on the family sloop. Keeping the San Juan on a trailer is an option, but when you’re the parent of young children, a trailer is one more obstacle to time on the water.

Setting a new mooring elsewhere presents legal hurdles, and the legality of re-anchoring outside the mooring field is murky. Last month, Florida reinforced its law preventing local governments from regulating the anchoring of non-liveaboard boats outside established mooring fields. (A liveaboard vessel is defined as one that is used solely as a residence and not for navigation.) This renders illegal the anchoring time limits that some cities (Sarasota included) have imposed. The new law, however, allows for communities to participate in state-approved “pilot” programs that could again bring strict anchoring rules.

To some degree, the fate of the San Juan still depends on how the anchoring rules are enforced locally. If the family can’t find an affordable, safe alternative, they are talking about storing the boat ashore, where the little San Juan will wait ... for a bit of sanity to return to this world.

*Cover photo: Harken sunglasses undergo optical testing at Pacific University College of Optometry. (Biobor photo credit: Mahina Expeditions.)*

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