

Editorials

Good news for Ormond Beach

Past desecrations won't be repeated

To the coastal crusaders who have been trying to save Ormond Beach from more developmental desecration, there was a double helping of good news this week.

— The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California has agreed to sell its share of 270 acres of beach property to the California Coastal Conservancy.

— The Ventura County District Attorney's Office has filed criminal charges against Halaco Engineering, the prime polluter in the Ormond Beach area.

Of the two events, the MWD decision to make that property available to the Coastal Conservancy is of far greater impact. When added to the 265 acres the conservancy has already purchased from Southern California Edison, the acquisition of another 270 acres would almost complete the plans to preserve a total of 700 acres at Ormond Beach.

The property involved is jointly owned by MWD and the city of Oxnard. Since a wetlands wildlife preserve would be the crowning environmental jewel for Oxnard, city officials should have no hesitation about joining in the decision to sell the property to the Coastal Commission. That would leave another 200 acres, now in private ownership, that the conservancy hopes to acquire, to complete the protection and preservation of that spectacular strip of Ventura County coast.

The Coastal Conservancy's involvement has saved Ormond Beach from more of the kind of industrial desecration that occurred in past decades. Some existing operations have left visible scars at Ormond Beach, scars that are proving almost impossible to remove.

The Halaco operation is the worst example, in terms of visual and respiratory pollution. Halaco runs a metal recycling plant that has been sued by government agencies before, both to clean up a huge, toxic slag heap that contaminates the beach and to comply with regulations regarding the release of illegal contaminants into the air.

The action by the District Attorney's Office was over violations of the company's operating permit, in failing to comply with required conditions to prevent air pollution. Resulting from a surprise inspection at the plant, these are the first criminal charges against Halaco. As misdemeanors, the charges carry a maximum penalty of \$25,000.

Halaco has managed to delay other official attempts to make the company comply with various regulations, even in court, but criminal charges are something different.

As is so often the case with beach preservation in Oxnard, what's happening at Ormond Beach is a tribute to the tenacity of Jean Harris, who fought development at Oxnard Shores until it included a public park, and has crusaded to save Ormond Beach from a variety of development schemes.

Coupled with the trend toward land acquisition by the Coastal Conservancy, the criminal charges against Halaco offer a doubly welcome prospect — not only that Ormond Beach will be preserved from further industrial scars for future generations, but also that some of the most visible existing scars may someday be removed.