

## Seeking more sand solutions on Plum Island

**By Victor Tine**

Staff writer

PLUM ISLAND — Concrete Jersey barriers surround the parking lot at Plum Island Center, placed there yesterday by Highway Department workers as the town gets ready for its next battle with the ocean.

Industrial-size sand-sifting machinery was at the Sewer Department facility on Olga Way yesterday in preparation for sifting operations to begin today. The clean sand produced there will be stockpiled at the Center parking lot, according to Conservation Agent Douglas Packer.

Town officials are scheduled to meet tomorrow morning with representatives of several state and federal agencies to try to decide the next step in stopping — or at least slowing down — the serious erosion of about 600 feet of the island's beach, from the Center northward.

State Sen. Bruce Tarr and his aide, Brendan McGonigle, were coordinating efforts yesterday to take action without running afoul of environmental regulations.

Tarr said he had asked Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency staff members to see if they could locate some sandbags with a 3,000-pound capacity for deployment on the beach.

He also said the Jersey barriers are intended to keep water that might rise above the level of the parking lot out of Plum Island and Northern boulevards. Both roads are lower than the parking lot.

Thirty barriers were in place yesterday, although there was still vehicular access to the parking lot itself.

One thing islanders don't need to worry about, however, is a precipitous shutoff of their newly installed water and sewer service.

Newburyport Mayor John Moak yesterday dismissed a report circulating in Newbury that city officials were preparing to close the water and sewer system at the Wilkinson Bridge to the island if there were a danger of sea water flowing into the pipes.

"I don't know where that would come from," he said of the rumor. "We wouldn't automatically shut down, because we don't know what a breach would do. Just because it breaches doesn't mean it's not going to work."

Moak wouldn't completely rule out a system shutdown, but he said it would happen only after review by water and sewer engineering staff.

"We have a team there that would assess (the situation)," he said.

Plum Island Center sustained another hit of erosion over the weekend, even under less-than-fierce weather conditions.

Local officials fear unusually high tides that are predicted for early May could present more of a problem, especially if the tide is accompanied by wind or a storm.

Tides at the Merrimack River entrance on May 5, 7 and 8 are expected to be about a foot and a half higher than normal, according to a chart on the Web site of the Massachusetts Marine Trades Association.

In mid-March, the town Highway Department put about 3,000 cubic yards of sand at the center, but the permit to do it was rescinded by the state Department of Environmental Protection.