Cameron truce uneasy

Cameron, La. (AP) - An uneasy truce held Sunday in Calcasieu Ship Channel, where two boaters were injured a day earlier as they tried to speed through a blockade manned by angry shrimpers protesting requirements that they pull turtle excluder devices.

Louisiana's National Guard was on alert and state police were sent to Cameron in case of trouble, but shrimpers and the Coast Guard said they didn't expect any - at least through Monday.

"Myself, I'm not out there to create any violence. I'm out there to prove a point and to try to get some people's attention. But they do have some hotheads out there and there's no telling what's going to happen," said Danny Shay, president of a shrimpers' group called Coastal Concern of Cameron.

Shay was among shrimpers who docked their boats Sunday at Cameron after a one-day protest which included scattered gunfire and other violence on the Louisiana and Texas coasts.

The blockade at Cameron and larger ones along the Texas coast were called to protest federal regulations that shrimpers place the so-called "TEDs" in their nets. The cage-like contraptions are designed to automatically, free endangered species of sea turtles that swim into nets by deflecting the animals through a trapdoor flap cut into the nets.

But shrimpers have long held that TEDs are unnecessary, dangerous to haul and let large numbers of shrimp out of their nets. Environmentalists say the devices are safe and cause no loss of shrimp when used properly.

Shay said one possible compromise might be having shrimpers haul TEDs only when and where turtles were most likely to show up. He said he caught eight or nine turtles - about half of which were live - during several months trawling off the Florida coast this year, but did not catch any in a similar period off the Louisiana coast.

"I have caught six turtles in my..."
life, and not a one has died. That was from 1965 to 1986. What harm did I do?” Tee John Mialjevich, president of Concerned Shrimpers of America and a leader of the blockade involving hundreds of ships at Galveston Harbor, said in a telephone interview.

Shay, of Creole, said he would be surprised if there wasn't some sort of violence Tuesday if U.S. Commerce Secretary Mosbacher doesn't back off rules requiring all shrimpers to draw TEDs at all times.

The Coast Guard, the Cameron Parish Sheriff's Office and protest leaders said shrimpers decided to end the weekend blockade while awaiting results of a Monday meeting involving Gulf Coast congressmen and Mosbacher.

However a spokeswoman in the New Orleans office of Rep. Billy Tauzin, D-La., a leader of the anti-TED faction, could not confirm the meeting.

The TED requirement, delayed for a year in 1988, went into effect May 1 but enforcement was phased in and then temporarily suspended while foes went to court and lobbied Congress. Mosbacher's decision last Thursday to resume enforcement sparked Saturday's protests.

"We decided that the press coverage and what we wanted to accomplish here to get our concerns across to people nationwide had been addressed so we no longer needed to continue our blockade of Galveston harbor," said Mialjevich, a shrimper from Gueydan, La. "So Sunday and Monday, we're not going to block the harbor."

But more trouble could follow Monday's meeting, he said.

"How long I can maintain this calm among the shrimpers is going to be determined by what happens with Mr. Mosbacher on Monday," said Mialjevich.

There were reports of guns being fired by shrimpers in the Louisiana and Texas waters Saturday and an oil crew boat reportedly was rammed by a shrimper near Cameron. Two shrimpers tried to ram a 32-foot Coast Guard patrol vessel but were turned back by the boat's high-pressure water hose, the Coast Guard said.

Despite the violence, no serious injuries were reported, although two recreational boaters were hospitalized briefly after they tried to rush through the blockade at Cameron.

Amos Broussard, 41, of Lake Charles, was piloting a boat with his girlfriend and another couple aboard when he decided to try to rush through the blockade after waiting more than an hour for Coast Guard help.

"I tried to make a high-speed run between the rocks and the shrimpers," he said. But he lost steering power and hit the rocks, he said. He and his friend Willie Gros, 46, of Sulfur, both suffered split lips.

Broussard said the shrimpers had warned him to stay away from the blockade.

"We asked 'What did we ever do to you?' and they said 'Y'all come through our blockade and we'll show you what we'll do to you,'" said Broussard, who was interviewed by telephone Sunday morning.

No Louisiana arrests were reported, although Capt. Arthur Whiting of the U.S. Coast Guard office in Port Arthur said several shrimpers would probably be issued citations once an investigation was complete.