

CNMI to use concrete balls to expand reefs

By Therese Padua

Pacific Daily News

Divers in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands soon will see an unusual sight — concrete balls with holes in them on the bottom of the ocean floor.

The balls, which are designed to expand and protect the reef by encouraging coral larvae to settle on them, are part of a new program that recently received federal funding.

A \$40,000 grant agreement to help preserve Northern Marianas coral reefs was signed Feb. 25, according to a press release from the U.S. Interior Department's Office of Insular Affairs.

The grant goes to the CNMI Division of Coastal Resources Management, which will use the money to:

- ▲ Develop printed educational materials to encourage people to enjoy and respect the reefs;

- ▲ Develop an educational CD-ROM on coral reef environments;

- ▲ Buy underwater equipment, such as cameras, for marine monitoring;

- ▲ Allow staff to attend coral reef conferences;

- ▲ Develop and place signs about the environment at key beach

FOR MORE INFO

For more information on reef balls, contact the Reef Ball Development Group:

- ▲ E-mail: reefball@america.net

- ▲ Web site:

<http://www.reefball.com>

- ▲ Telephone: (941) 752-0169

- ▲ Fax (941) 752-1033

- ▲ Address: P.O. Box 3349

- ▲ Sarasota, FL 34230-3349

For more information on the reef balls and other reef projects funded by the new grant, call the Northern Marianas Division of Coastal Resources Management at (670) 234-6623.

areas; and

- ▲ Place and monitor the reef balls.

The placement of the reef balls likely will begin by the first week of April, according to Felipe Q. Atalig of the Northern Marianas Division of Coastal Resources Management. The balls have been used around the world to create reef environments, according to the non-profit Reef Ball Development Group.

According to the Insular Affairs

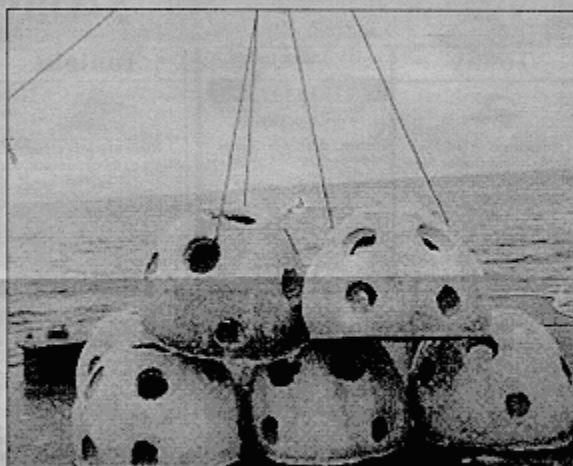


Photo courtesy of the Reef Ball Development Group

Coral homes: Reef balls, made of specially molded concrete, are designed to attract coral larvae. Reef balls will be placed in underwater sites around the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas under a program funded by a new federal grant.

Office, the balls, which range in size from 6 inches to 6 feet, will be placed 25 feet to 30 feet below the water level in six CNMI locations:

- ▲ LauLau Bay,

- ▲ Boy Scout Beach,

- ▲ Obyan Beach,

- ▲ Ladder Beach,

- ▲ Coral Ocean Point, and

- ▲ Main Lagoon.