



Homeland Security Institute
Quick Look Report
Gulf Coast Small Vessel Security Summit
Hilton Hobby Hotel, Houston, Texas
Saturday, January 10, 2009

The Gulf Coast Small Vessel Security Summit was held in Houston Texas on January 10, 2009, attended by approximately 115 stakeholders from the small vessel community.

RADM Joel R. Whitehead, U.S. Coast Guard Commander, Eighth District, described the nature of threats associates with small vessels, and provided real world examples of terrorist attacks using small vessels. He emphasized that it is critical that all sectors and stakeholders cooperate in dealing with the threats. He used the experience of hurricane Ike to illustrate the nature of the risk of not doing so, noting that the closing of the Houston Ship Channel, even for relatively small time periods, had enormous economic consequences locally, and national social and economic impacts. He distinguished between indirect effects and direct effects of events such as the terrorist attack in Mumbai. He noted that small vessels, particularly recreational vessels, are not yet part of the security system that builds on the regulations that govern large commercial vessels. He stressed the need to find appropriate measures to engage this huge community.

LCDR John Taylor, U.S. Coast Guard reviewed the goals and approaches taken by the America’s Waterways Watch program. After showing a video presentation featuring Commandant Allen and illustrating the reporting of suspicions activities in various settings, he reiterated the necessity of citizen involvement and vigilance. He reviewed several examples of program successes, and pointed to the nexus of domestic crime and terrorist activities.

Mr. Alfonso Campos Chief of Marine Enforcement, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Austin, Texas, moderated the industry stakeholder panel. His opening comments stressed the commitment of the authorities to engage openly with and be accessible to the small vessel community. He described the broad range of activities of his office and its recognition of the fine balance of safety and security, the roles of authorities and civilians, and the high degree to which authorities rely on voluntary activities.

Ms. Tava Foret, Action Group Companies described her company activities in facilitating training, planning and compliance for the tug and barge industry. Noting their commitment to working with the authorities to promote security, she pointed out that high rates of employee turnover meant that the task was difficult and expensive for employers. She commented that it is crucial that workers have an incentive for



participating in programs, and used TWIC as an example where workers have little personal motivation.

Mr. Russell Grimes, Houston Safe Boating Council, HPD Lake Patrol, used the Texas Water Safety Act to illustrate how complex it is to deal with both safety and security in the Houston area. He pointed to the scale of the marine environment as a major security challenge, in particular the large number of facilities and diversity of the local infrastructure, the small number of public safety officials and the very large number of recreational boaters. He noted that these factors create a good bit of stress on all. His comments and responses to questions from participants pointed to the necessity of persistent education and training, and the need for voluntary action by small vessel operators in partnership with local safety and security authorities.

Captain Steven Huttman, G & H Towing, described the activities of his company in fostering security. He related how G&H worked with the authorities during the recent storm as an example of what the industry can do if appropriately engaged as a partner. He noted that commercial interests are faced with multiple credential/identification card requirements, which raise costs without improving security.

Mr. Alan Post, Director of Operations, Star Fleet, described how the small passenger vessel industry, even while being a willing partner with the authorities, has been caught in the trough between large scale and costly security measures designed to protect an entire world of threats, and the risks that are localized but potentially just as damaging. He suggested that for small companies operating on decreasing budgets, costly large-scale security measures can be the “final hole that sinks the boat”, and that staying afloat in this uncertain economic time would require a balancing act between responsibilities and regulations, with revenue realities. He pointed out that a way to maintain an adequate level of security without breaking the bank is by engaging in “security theater” to boost the perception of being secure. Mr. Post challenged the participants to think about the physical security measures that can show a certain level of security to the public, to bolster the perception and thus the reality of being more secure.

Mr. Rick Morris, Galveston Ferry, Texas DOT, suggested that more public awareness and understanding of safety and security concerns is needed. He described the risks to safety and security relating to small vessels, particularly recreational boats, inherent in ferry operations, and the huge economic risks associated with possible closings of the ship channel.

Mr. Creighton Maynard, Chief Commander, United States Power Squadron, Fort Worth, Texas reviewed the role of his organization and the large number of boaters they reach. He showcased a comprehensive set of instructional manuals that Power Squadron provides for its more than 50,000 members. He described work done in conjunction with America’s Waterway Watch and the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and indicated the Power



Squadron was ready to become a major channel for reaching the recreational boating community for increasing awareness and for training about security matters.

Scenario based discussion exercises, facilitated by the Homeland Security Institute's George Murphy dealt with ways to detect, deter or prevent terrorist attacks at two major ports in the Region. The exercises engaged the audience to explore a broad range of elements in the richly layered security strategy that has been deployed and is evolving through initiatives such as the small vessel security strategy. Participant's brought their experience and ideas into the discussions. They shared suggestions about operations in the Houston area, and what they believed was required and was workable from practical operational and economic perspectives. The discussions drove home the complexity of the overall problem and the utility of a risk based and flexible layered strategy of security in depth. Specific recommendations included providing greater public education about threats and suspicious activity reporting programs, the inclusion of small vessel stakeholders in security committees, and greater use of the commercial small vessel community in exercises aimed at the authorities and the public.

Mr. Robert Gauvin, U.S. Coast Guard DHS Small Vessel Security Strategy, wrapped up the discussion. He solicited additional remarks from the audience, and provided information on the strategy implementation plans of DHS. He reiterated the commitment that DHS has to sustaining the strong partnership that it has with the small vessel community as it works to deal with the security threats facing the nation.

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