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# Managing the Risk

## *The National Small Vessel Security Summit.*

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Since 9/11, much of the focus in maritime security has been on large commercial vessels. However, world events have led many security experts to become concerned that terrorists could exploit small vessels (those of less than 300 gross tons) to cause disruption and damage to our maritime transportation system. Small commercial vessels run the gamut from towing and fishing vessels to uninspected passenger vessels. Recreational small vessels could be anything from jet skis to yachts. There are approximately 13 million registered recreational vessels<sup>1</sup> as well as an estimated 4 million unregistered recreational boats in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, large numbers of small vessels operate within close proximity to critical infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> One limited study of select ports around the U.S. showed that many small vessels were likely to operate within close proximity to important infrastructure. For nine ports examined, there were approximately 3,000 small commercial vessels, 3,000 fishing vessels, and 400,000 recreational vessels that were likely to operate near important maritime infrastructure.<sup>4</sup>

### **The National Small Vessel Security Summit**

With such large numbers of small vessels operating within the vicinity of critical infrastructure, complete elimination of risk would be impossible without sacrificing fundamental freedoms and individual liberty. The goal, therefore, is to manage this risk based on the expected consequences, resulting in acceptable levels of security.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recognized that the agency should address small vessel risks

**INFORMATION**



**Admiral Thad Allen, Commandant, USCG, responds to a participant question. USCG photos by Mr. Telfair H. Brown.**

in close consultation with small vessel stakeholders. Therefore, DHS invited more than 400 participants with a range of interests in small vessels to the National Small Vessel Security Summit. Presenters included the honorable Michael Chertoff, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security; ADM Thad Allen, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard; Mr. W. Ralph Basham, Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection; and Mr. Vayl Oxford, Director, Domestic Nuclear Detection Office.

Over the course of two days in June 2007, DHS personnel and other officials engaged small vessel stakeholders in discussions on a range of issues regarding security risks relevant to small vessel operations in the





**DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff delivers the keynote address, underscoring the importance the agency places on small vessel security.**

U.S. maritime domain. Objectives for the National Small Vessel Security Summit included:

- Educate small vessel stakeholders on security risks in the U.S. maritime domain.
- Provide a national forum for small vessel stakeholders to present and discuss their ideas on developing security measures to mitigate gaps in small vessel management and control in the maritime domain.
- Provide a national forum for state and local government officials, as well as private members of the small vessel population, to discuss transportation concerns regarding security threats and present their ideas for addressing those threats.
- Record all issues and concerns from the small vessel stakeholders and complete an after-action report for the public, industry, and government to support conclusions for national-level decisions involving the development of small vessel security measures to detect, deter, interdict, and defeat terrorist use of small vessels in the U.S. maritime domain.<sup>5</sup>

The Department of Homeland Security recognized that not everyone interested in small vessel security could make the trip to the Washington, D.C., area. Furthermore, issues vary significantly among regions, so a number of regional summits are planned as well. Interested parties can check for further information on the regional summits at [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).

## DHS Response

Although the dialogue with the small vessel community is still ongoing, DHS has already started to take action on summit findings. For example, the agency organized a small vessel security workgroup to draft a DHS small vessel security strategy.

Since the summit, the Coast Guard has launched the vessel identification system (VIS). VIS data consists of registration and ownership data from participating VIS states and the USCG National Vessel Documentation Center. VIS data will only be accessible to registration and law enforcement personnel. States that participate in the VIS will have access to boat registration and ownership data from other states and USCG-documented vessels in a single database.

The Coast Guard is also working diligently to improve America's Waterway Watch (AWW), which seeks to leverage those who live and work in and around our nation's waterways as an additional set of eyes and ears.<sup>6</sup> In addition to increasing public awareness of the AWW program, the Coast Guard is also in the process of developing and expanding an effort modeled after the 13<sup>th</sup> District's Citizen's Action Network.<sup>7</sup> It is currently working to expand the Citizen's Action Network program nationally, recruiting volunteer citizens to act as a force multiplier for the Coast Guard and training them to be agents of maritime domain awareness.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Domestic Nuclear Detection Office announced a pilot program that will provide maritime radiation detection capabilities for state and local authorities in Washington's Puget Sound and California's San Diego areas. The program involves development of a radiation detection architecture that will reduce the risk of radiological and nuclear threats that could be illegally transported on recreational or small commercial vessels.

The national summit is but the first step in a series of efforts to build a culture of partnership between the government and the small vessel community. Much work remains to be done, but with the publication of the DHS small vessel security strategy, the private sector and federal, state, and local governments will have a common framework as we work together to reduce small vessel-related risks.

### *About the author:*

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**Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> "2006 Boating Statistics," COMDTPUB 16754.20, U.S. Coast Guard, p. 18.
- <sup>2</sup> "United States Coast Guard Navigation Safety Information Prototype User Needs and Wants Study/Business Case," U.S. Coast Guard Research and Development Center, March 10, 2003, Table 5: NSI User Group Characteristics.
- <sup>3</sup> The USA Patriot Act of 2001, 42 U.S.C. § 519 c(e), defines critical infrastructure as those "systems and assets, whether physical or virtual, so vital to the United States that the incapacity or destruction of such systems and as-

- sets would have a debilitating impact on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination of those matters."
- <sup>4</sup> "An Assessment of Small Vessel Populations in U.S. Waters," U.S. Coast Guard Research and Development Center, June 2007, p. 31.
  - <sup>5</sup> "Report of the DHS National Small Vessel Security Summit," Homeland Security Institute, October 19, 2007. This report is available at [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).
  - <sup>6</sup> For more information on AWW, visit [www.americaswaterwaywatch.org](http://www.americaswaterwaywatch.org).
  - <sup>7</sup> For more information on the program, see [www.uscg.mil/d13/can/](http://www.uscg.mil/d13/can/).

## PARTICIPANT FINDINGS

Discussions at the summit were wide-ranging and covered many aspects of maritime governance.

Highlights included:

### Need for a national strategy

This strategy should address international cooperation to identify threats as far from our shores as possible. It needs to be flexible to allow for local conditions and should not advocate procedures that are unduly burdensome or overly restrictive.

### Stakeholder view of the small vessel threat

Participants generally viewed recreational vessels as a larger threat than commercial small vessels. Small commercial operators tend to be involved in smaller, closer-knit maritime communities and are on the water every day, making it more likely that these operators would notice if something was amiss.

### Balance the trade-offs among freedom, security, and economy

Participants felt that overly restrictive and burdensome regulations do little to increase security, and will alienate the small vessel community.

### Improve intelligence, analysis, and dissemination

Summit stakeholders generally agreed that there needs to be improved intelligence and the ability to act upon it.

### Expand education and outreach to citizen stakeholders

America's Waterway Watch was discussed extensively, and summit participants expressed a very strong consensus that it needs to be expanded and re-energized.

### Operator and vessel identification

Opposition to a "federal" recreational boating license was universal. There was some acceptance of boating licenses that would incorporate already existing identifications, such as a "boating" endorsement on a state motor vehicle operator's license.

### Employ technologies to detect radiological and nuclear threats

There was widespread support for use of radiation detectors, despite some concern over operational effectiveness and the ability to use them far enough away from the port to allow for adequate response.

### Reassess security zones

Security zones were the subject of much discussion at the summit. There was not, however, a consensus on whether they should be more clearly marked and publicized. Some felt that this might make it easier to identify possible targets of attack. There was agreement, however, on the need to educate the boating public on safety and security zones.

**Endnote:**

Adapted from the "Report of the DHS National Small Vessel Security Summit," Homeland Security Institute, October 19, 2007. This report is available at [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).

