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## Recreational Boating Safety and Homeland Security Work Together

Going back a few years, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary had a few, straight-forward missions. Vessel examinations, public education and safety patrols were the mainstays of Auxiliary efforts. Later, marine safety and environmental protection missions were added to the mix. These mission areas required the addition of a substantial number of skill sets, both on and off

resources from numerous federal, state and local agencies.

Homeland security efforts are here to stay. All of the efforts focused on the execution and planning for homeland security have caused many of our members to question the priority level for recreational boating safety missions. I think most agree that the need for recreational

In September 2003, we introduced the Coast Guard Auxiliary's Waterway Watch program as a way for our members to engage the boating public in homeland security measures. The concept is similar to neighborhood watch programs but is focused on our waterways as the neighborhood. Our public education and vessel safety check missions provide opportunities to orient the public on what to look for and how to report questionable activities. From the start we had PowerPoint presentations, for both PE classes and public affairs missions. More recently we have crated brochures and window stickers for boats.



the water. Then, the black cloud created by the 9/11 crisis seemed to change everything.

The Coast Guard, with the cooperation of the states, launched an incredible number of security operations. The Coast Guard Auxiliary supported these surge operations with hundreds of thousands of hours devoted to security patrols, both on the water and in the air.

These security efforts have recently become more structured but still require substantial levels of effort. Also, with the threat or prediction of terrorist activity, security efforts can quickly return to surge levels. In addition, with the formation of the department of Homeland Security there has been no letup in contingency planning and efforts to integrate

boating safety efforts have not diminished. However, with a finite level of labor available, what mission takes priority?

Fortunately, as we have examined the question, there is a great deal of compatibility between homeland security and recreational boating safety missions. Granted, the demand for more patrols is a heavy load but recreational boating safety efforts are the activities that produce the most new members. Contact with the public, through public education, vessel safety checks and the visitation program, gives us the opportunity to acquaint people with security issues and solicit new members. Beyond that, we now have a program to involve the recreational boating public, in a more direct fashion, in homeland security efforts.

With a donation by the Nationwide Company, we now have a supply of orientation materials that can be passed out in classes and during vessel safety checks. Further, the brochures can be utilized in the visitation program for countertop displays in commercial establishments accessible to boaters. Along with the brochures, boaters are presented a very attractive sticker or decal to be placed in a boat window near the helm station. The front, or outward facing side, indicates to all that see it that the boater may be eyes and ears for happenings on the waterways. The side of the sticker facing the operator lists a summary of what to look for. Both sides present phone numbers to report suspicious activities. Of course, this program is not limited to recreational boaters. Commercial operators, marina operators, boat dealers and others can be active participants. Supporters of the program may also want to display a sticker on their personal car or truck window.

There are several local or regional programs similar to Waterway Watch. Our intention is to present the concept on a broad national basis that is available to a wide audience. In addition, the Coast Guard is developing America's Waterway Watch, a program that will act as an umbrella for all the existing programs. Hopefully the Coast Guard program will add a marketing push to attract boaters to the effort.

So, do we want homeland security or recreational boating safety? The answer is we need all of it. Educated boaters tend to operate with greater safety awareness. At the same time, informed boaters can contribute to homeland security efforts. To aid those protecting our nation, recreational boaters can be additional "eyes and ears" on the waterways.

