



[Small vessel security – how you can help](#)

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Last week's Boston Marathon bombings served as another reminder that in this post-9/11 world, we all need to be vigilant and speak up if we see something that seems amiss. That includes being aware on the water. Recreational boaters have a role to play in helping keep our waterways safe from attacks.

Department of Homeland Security and the Small Vessel Strategy

It should be no surprise that with the United States Coast Guard as the primary protector of our waters that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), its parent agency, continues to evolve and refine a strategy for dealing with small vessels.

As described in DHS documents, the Small Vessel Security Strategy (SVSS) addresses the risk that "small vessels might be used to smuggle terrorists or weapon of mass destruction (WMD) into the United States or might be used as either a stand-off weapon platform or as a means of a

direct attack with a waterborne improvised explosive device (WBIED).”

For the purposes of the SVSS, a small vessel is anything under 300 gross tons – which is a pretty wide net. Such small vessels include commercial fishing vessels, recreational boats and yachts, towing vessels, uninspected passenger vessels or any other small commercial vessels involved in foreign or U.S. voyages.

The risks are substantial, so the net should be wide. Security risks for small vessels can be broken down into four general categories:

- Use of small vessels to smuggle weapons (including, but not limited to, weapons of mass destruction)
- Use of small vessels as waterborne improvised explosive devices – small, explosive-laden vessels used as “boat bombs” against vessels, maritime critical infrastructure or key resources (for example, the 2000 USS Cole bombing)
- Use of small vessels as a conveyance to smuggle terrorists into the U.S.
- Use of small vessels as platforms for standoff weapons (for example, for launching missiles offshore) attacks on the maritime industry or critical infrastructure

With that as the set of risks, the overarching goals of the SVSS are to:

- Enhance maritime security and safety based on a coherent framework with a layered, innovative approach
- Leverage technology to enhance the ability to detect, infer intent, and when necessary, interdict small vessels that pose a maritime security threat
- Enhance cooperation among international, federal, state, local, and tribal partners and the private sector (e.g., marinas, shipyards, small vessel and facility operators), and in coordination with the Department of State, other relevant federal departments and agencies and international partners
- Develop and leverage a strong partnership with the small vessel community and public and private sectors in order to enhance maritime domain awareness

So where do you, as boaters, fit into the goals of the Small Vessel Security Strategy? You are important partners in the Coast Guard’s efforts to enhance awareness of suspicious behavior on the water.

What IS Suspicious Behavior?

Well, frankly, whatever you *think* is suspicious – for your marina, your community, your waters.

The Coast Guard’s maritime domain awareness specialists always stress that we can’t develop an all-encompassing list of what is suspicious. It is a little like defining pornography. In 1964, United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously tried to explain pornography by saying, “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be [pornography]... but I know it when I see it.”

Suspicious behavior could be the way someone asks you a question, or the pictures that they seem intent on taking of a bridge or a fuel depot, or a particularly intense focus on a secure perimeter that just sets the hair on the back of your neck up. Don't ignore that vibe. Don't worry about looking like a "sky-is-falling-worrywort."

Report such behavior by calling the National Response Center at 877-24WATCH. If there appears to be immediate danger to life or property, call 911 or the U.S. Coast Guard on Marine Channel 16.

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux@aol.com or go direct to the D1SR Human Resources department, who are in charge of new members matters, at [DSO-HR](#) and we will help you "get in this thing..."