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Small Vessel Security Strategy – And You

As if the actions in Boston on Monday, 4/15/13, including the murder of three civilians, an eight-year-old and two young women, needed to remind us of the terroristic threats that are out there, we've all seen the slogan, "If you see something, say something!" You've even read about that and the over-arching theme of maritime domain awareness here (see The Independent website at www.indyeastend.com, "If You See Something, Say Something", 11/5/08; "Back to the Future – With Maritime Domain Awareness", 3/21/07; "Training for The Unspeakable", 9/20/06.) And as we've moved through time since 9/11/01, we've adapted to what threats have presented themselves to us ("Take off your shoes and put them in the bin with your 'baggie' of toiletries.") and that extends to the maritime domain. This column is about that.

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 DHS, our '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 to throw out there. 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. This definition distinguishes small vessels from large commercial vessels and yachts (generally 300 gross tons and over) that are applicable to security measures already put in place under the authority of the Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA) of 2002 and the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code.

The risks are, as you read above, non-trivial so the net should be wide. More specifically:

Security Risks for Small Vessels

Security risks for small vessels can be broken down into four general categories:

Use of small vessels as a conveyance to smuggle weapons (including, but not limited to,

Weapons of Mass Destruction/Effect);

Use of small vessels as Water Borne Improvised Explosive Device - small, explosive-laden vessels used as "boat bombs" against another vessel, maritime critical infrastructure, or key resources; (Remember the US Cole)

Use of small vessels as a conveyance to smuggle terrorists into the U.S.; and

Use of small vessels as a platform for standoff weapon (e.g. Man Portable Air Defense Systems, SCUD platform for launch 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; and

-- 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 and other relevant federal departments and agencies, 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.

Where do we, the citizens of this great country, fit in? Well, if you said "Number four, of course," give yourself a gold star.

What Is Suspicious Behavior?

Well, frankly, whatever you think is suspicious – for your marina, your community, and your waters . . . The Maritime Domain Awareness professionals within US Coast Guard Forces always stress that we can't develop an all-encompassing list of what is suspicious. It is a little like defining pornography. In 1964, Justice Potter Stewart 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."

It may 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-worrywart." Call it in. Call the National Response Center at 877-24WATCH if there is "Immediate Danger" to Life or Property, call 9-1-1 or call the US Coast Guard on Marine Channel 16.

If you want more information, email smallvesselsecurity@uscg.mil or email me below.

If you want your own copy of the SVSS, email me below or go to <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/small-vessel-security-strategy.pdf> and download it.

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...”