

RVOC Research Vessel Security Committee Update

At the autumn, 2001 Research Vessel Operators' Committee meeting in Rhode Island, the assembled Marine Superintendents voted to form a 'Security Sub-Committee' which would serve as a point of contact and communications outlet regarding related issues as they face the Academic Research Vessel community. The attempted pirate attack on the R/V Ewing, followed by the terrorist attacks of September 11th, have focused our attention on the safety of our vessels as they conduct their missions around the globe.

Maritime security -- both for deployed ships and as an element of Homeland Defense -- has become a major national concern. New regulations or suggestions from a host of newly created instant "experts" promise to affect everything from "smart" mariners' identification cards to container screening to 96 hour notice requirements to/from U.S. ports to the addition of "Sea Marshals" on the bridge in certain waters. This is a dynamic time and the way in which ship operators conduct business is in a period of significant change.

Some of us have attended a number of forums around the country on this issue. So far (at least in the opinion of the sub-committee chairman), the presentations, such as those given at the last Council Meeting in November of 2001, have been unimpressive. The advice tendered by some agency spokespersons is quite often dated, narrow in focus and sounds like it came from a script written ten years before Sept. 11th. The presenters and spokespersons are not to blame: the new War on Terrorism has taken many of our leaders and citizens by surprise.

Websites on Maritime Security, piracy, threats to shipping, port security, war risk insurance, etc. continue to proliferate. A general over view of these sites is available at the UNOLS Security Maritime Security Site <http://www.unols.org/rvoc/security.html> . By far the most useful information available to mariners is the Office of Naval Intelligence weekly briefing prepared by Charles Dragonette http://pollux.nss.nima.mil/onit/onit_j_main.html. Beyond the information provided by the Office of Naval Intelligence, there is very little in the way of new information on this issue.

Every edition of every maritime magazine or journal, since September, has an article (or several) on Maritime Security. Most of these repeat what is already common knowledge rather than add useful information. The new links provided by the UNOLS website are a useful shortcut to some of these websites so that the information is accessible for everyone's use.

A major "U.S. Maritime Security Exhibition and Conference" is coming up this September in New York, the week before our UNOLS Meetings in Washington, DC. Some of us are planning on attending this Conference, and hopefully we'll have some useful--maybe more sophisticated--information to share afterward. MTS is including a 'Maritime Security & Technology' session at Oceans 2002 in Biloxi, MS, in late October.

Woods Hole and LAMONT now have "Security Guides" which were prepared by their security contractors. This information has some useful information for UNOLS operators and will be made available for general distribution to the fleet after revisions and editing.

Joe Coburn, WHOI, also reports that after an in-depth review with WHOI's insurer they have confirmed that their vessels are covered against terrorist action. As in the past they are required to inform their carriers of their ships schedules and keep them updated on any changes to the published schedules. Joe sees no reason for WHOI to forego a research objective on the basis of insurance.

The underwriter for LAMONT has provided them with a list of high risk areas which includes the Persian and Arabian Gulf and adjacent Gulf of Oman north of 24N. Operations in these regions are not precluded under their policy, however additional premiums will be assessed to vessels working in these areas.

The current batch of Ship Time Requests flooding into the UNOLS Office include at least one requesting a ship for work along the Somali coastline and there may be others indicating a desire to work near the Indonesian archipelago.