UNOLS News

Exciting updates from UNOLS & the Academic Research Fleet

July 2026 - Volume 40, No. 3

Community Updates

Marking Scientific Equipment at Sea: A Long-Standing Maritime Safety Recommendation

The US State Department has informed the UNOLS Office of a little-known 1963 resolution adopted by the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (the predecessor to today's International Maritime Organization) that provides guidance that remains relevant for oceanographic researchers deploying equipment at sea. The resolution recommends that moored and drifting scientific instruments be clearly marked to reduce collision risks, aid recovery, and prevent confusion with navigation aids. For anchored and drifting oceanographic stations, the guidance calls for distinctive flashing white-blue lights, high-visibility fluorescent yellow and red striping, radar reflectors where practical, and identifying numbers or inscriptions to discourage tampering. The resolution also recommends notifying mariners of equipment locations through established channels such as Notices to Mariners and radio warnings, and avoiding placement in heavily trafficked shipping lanes. While researchers should verify any more recent national or international requirements that may apply, the resolution provides a useful set of best practices for designing and deploying scientific equipment in ways that promote both maritime safety and successful recovery of research assets. The complete text can be found here.

HOV Alvin ReCertified after Overhaul

The human-occupied submersible Alvin has been officially recertified by the U.S. Navy and returned to service following a comprehensive overhaul and testing program. The certification authorizes Alvin to dive to depths of 6,500 meters, reaffirming its status as one of the world's premier deep-sea research vehicles. During post-overhaul sea trials, Alvin successfully completed a 6,374-meter test dive, demonstrating its readiness to support scientists exploring some of the most remote regions of the ocean. Owned by the U.S. Navy and operated by WHOI as part of the National Deep Submergence Facility, Alvin continues its decades-long legacy of enabling groundbreaking discoveries through direct human observation of the deep ocean. See the complete article here.

Photo credit: Bridget Harrell-Donze

MFP Updates

Account Management Reminder

When you change your institution, name, or email address, **please do not create a new account** on MFP.
Instead, contact:

- Bridget Harrell-Donze — bridget@unols.org
- Stefani Martynenko — stefani@unols.org

We will update your information on your existing account. Creating multiple accounts causes confusion for operators and complicates scheduling workflows.

The Hazardous Material step of MFP

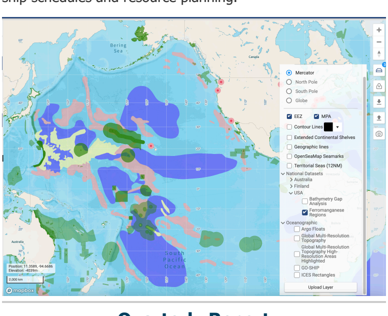
The Hazardous Material step of MFP has been significantly updated to improve usability and compliance tracking.
Key Enhancements

- Engraved table format — provides a structured, standardized way to capture hazardous material details.
- Bulk upload functionality — allows science parties to efficiently add multiple entries at once, reducing manual input time.

Additional details and guidance on using the new features can be found here.

New Map Layer Added

A new layer in MFP's map planning tools highlights USGS seabed characterization priorities to better align ARF scheduling with NOMEC projects. This update gives schedulers, PIs, and the NOMEC team expanded visibility into ship schedules and resource planning.



Quarterly Report

The UNOLS 2026 Q2 Report can be found at this link.

UNOLS Office Quarterly Report

Period: Q2 2026
April – June 2026

MEETINGS | NEXT QUARTER PLANS

MATE | OTHER INITIATIVES | SCHEDULING

ARF 2nd Qtr Science Summary

	Days	Cruises
Global	330	14
Ocean / Int	279	29
Regional	22	6
Coastal / Local	292	30

COMMITTEES | MFP

The MATE Program Sends SINCERE THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS!

We extend our sincere gratitude to our sponsors for their generous support of the **2026 UNOLS-MATE Marine Technical Internship Program.** The valued contributions made by the National Science Foundation, the Office of Naval Research, the Schmidt Ocean Institute, the Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation, and Kongsberg Discovery, have made it possible to coordinate life changing internships for more talented applicants this year.

Thanks to the funding received, seven internships have been completed and at least six others are planned for the remainder of the year. Internships take place at-sea aboard Academic Research Fleet vessels, in the shipyard during vessel overhaul and repairs, and at UNOLS-designated supporting facilities. These internships offer interns an unparalleled transformative experience that accelerates professional growth.

Ken Csukas assisted with the most recent HOV Alvin overhaul at the WHOI National Deep Submergence Facility; Paige FitzPatrick assisted with new installations of oceanographic instruments and systems in the shipyard followed by an acoustics calibrations cruise on R/V *Sikuliaq*; Conrado Acevedo-Batiz helped prepare shipboard equipment and instruments for deployment during a transit from Hawaii to the Marshall Islands on R/V *Langseth*; Avery Wilson, Benjamin Adler, and Cate McLeod provided technical support during a science expedition from Fiji to New Caledonia on R/V *Thompson* to study subduction initiation; and Christina Rorres supported various research deployments from Woods Hole, MA to Reykjavik, Iceland on R/V *Armstrong* to study overturning in the Subpolar North Atlantic.

Other internships planned for this Fall will be hosted by the HOV Alvin Group and STEMSEAS on board R/V *Atlantis*, the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences on board R/V *Atlantic Explorer,* the University of Washington on board R/V *Thompson*, and the Hawaii Ocean Time-series Science Team at the University of Hawaii Science Lab and on board R/V *Kilo Moana*. Sponsor support will also fund intern participation at the 2026 RVTEC Meeting this November.

Interns are matched with enthusiastic mentors who are eager to share their knowledge, provide high quality training, and support professional development. The interns feel this experience has helped them define their career goals. They received on-the-job training not available in the classroom, developed lasting professional relationships, and acquired the specialized, hands-on skill sets needed to step into a marine technical role. They are all pursuing careers as Marine Engineers or Technicians with the ARF and other ocean-related organizations.

Without funding, we would not be able to offer these opportunities. We are deeply grateful to our sponsors for investing in the future of our interns. Thank you!

Congratulations to Ken Csukas for Completing the 2025-2026 UNOLS-MATE Marine Technical Long-term Internship!

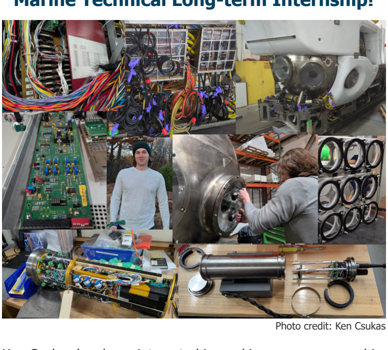


Photo credit: Ken Csukas

Ken Csukas has been interested in working on oceanographic research vessels for many years, and one of his ultimate goals is to pilot the Human Occupied Vehicle (HOV) Alvin operated by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI). Before shifting into oceanographic research support, Ken held technical roles focused on telecommunications, networking, and control systems. In pursuit of his long-term career goal, he began a merchant mariner career, worked for various marine research educational programs, and enrolled in a Robotics degree program. Through his coursework, he completed projects in computer programming, electronics, robotic operating systems, microcontrollers, and built an impressive unmanned surface vehicle with autonomous sonar mapping capabilities for lake research. All of this work led him to apply to the UNOLS-MATE Marine Technical Internship Program.

Ken had the incredible opportunity to intern with WHOI's National Deep Submergence Facility providing land-based technical support during the HOV Alvin overhaul period. He worked with cutting-edge equipment and instruments alongside dedicated engineers and marine technicians while disassembling and reassembling the upgraded manned submersible. He took advantage of every learning opportunity, gaining comprehensive, practical, hands-on experience with complex mechanical, electrical, and computer systems. Ken documented his weekly activities, provided project details with photos, showcased his new skills, and shared insights on the Marine Technical Internship Blog.

Ken expanded his expertise alongside many seasoned professionals, and thrived under the dedicated mentorship provided by Kaitlyn Beardshear who also interned with the Alvin Group during the 2020 overhaul. Kaitlyn has worked as a full-time Engineer for over five years, completed the DSV Alvin Pilot Certification last year, and has piloted the manned submersible on renowned deep-ocean expeditions. Ken was hired at the end of his internship as an Assistant Engineer. He provided support throughout the post-overhaul Alvin sea trials while dives were conducted at increasing depth, beginning in St. Georges Harbor, Bermuda. He also participated during an exploration of the Quest and Terra Nova shipwreck sites off the coast of Labrador and Greenland, respectively, and a science expedition on the Mid Atlantic Ridge studying visual adaptations in hydrothermal vent shrimp.

Ken is planning to return to school this Fall to complete his studies in Robotics and Automation Engineering, while continuing to pursue his long-term career goals.

Congratulations Ken!!!

Committee News

Safety Committee and RVOC Annual Meetings held at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

The Safety Committee and the Research Vessel Operators' Committee (RVOC) held their annual meetings in early May at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. There were many engaging discussions on a wide spectrum of relevant issues related to fleet operations. More information about what was discussed can be found in the meeting minutes and at the meeting agenda. Meeting presentations can be found on the Safety Committee Meeting and RVOC Meeting websites. Many thanks to WHOI as they were an outstanding host including providing tours of WHOI's facilities and R/V *Atlantis*!

As is tradition several commendations were awarded. The Victual Award for the best grub went to R/V *Neil Armstrong*. R/V *Rachel Carson* won the Oscar Award for the fastest person overboard recovery. R/V *Neil Armstrong* also earned the Bodacious Bilge Award for the cleanest bilges in the fleet.

Photo credit: Bridget Harrell-Donze

2026 RVTEC Meeting

Fleet Highlights

R/V ATLANTIS & HOV Alvin part of a historic expedition

The 2026 Heroic Age Expedition is being conducted aboard the U.S. Office of Naval Research's research vessel R/V *Atlantis*, operated by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI). This expedition is the first comprehensive visual surveys of the wrecks of *Quest* and *Terra Nova* in the Labrador Sea. Led by the Royal Canadian Geographical Society in partnership with WHOI, the expedition is using the HOV *Alvin* and other advanced technologies to document these historic vessels—the final ships associated with legendary polar explorers Sir Ernest Shackleton and Captain Robert Falcon Scott. The project is providing new insights into an important chapter of polar exploration while helping preserve the maritime heritage of the Heroic Age. See the complete article here.

UW's R/V *Thompson* is turning 35!

Global Class R/V *Thomas G. Thompson* (AGOR-23), owned by the U.S. Navy and operated by the University of Washington, turns 35 this summer. The ship, named for the founder of UW oceanography, has sailed the world's oceans throughout its long career delivering world-class science, developing future oceanographers, and enabling U.S. leadership in oceanographic science.

The ship completed a $52M major mid-life refit in late 2016 that included repowering the ship and replacing many obsolescent systems allowing it to continue beyond its initial planned service life of 30 years. Sister ships, R/V *Roger Revelle* and R/V *Atlantis*, also completed similar extensive mid-life refits further extending their expected services lives from 30 to 40-45 years. The ships undergo regular NSF and U.S. Navy INSURV inspections that allow the institutions and federal agencies to continually review and assess the structural, mechanical, electrical, and scientific condition, effectiveness and relevance for continued worldwide oceanographic research service. These Global Ships continue to deliver excellent scientific data and sampling through the superb stewardship of their operations by the operating institutions, the mariners and Marine Technicians who crew and maintain them, and unwavering support by the federal funding agencies – NSF and ONR in particular.

35 years is a long time to operate a ship! Most commercial ocean-going ships operate 25-30 years. U.S. military ships typically **last** about a decade longer than commercial cargo ships because they are built to more demanding standards and they usually undergo extensive life-extension programs such as has been the case with the AGOR-23 ships. The point is – the end of service of life is coming quickly for the three AGOR-23 ships and has already arrived for other ships in the fleet.

Efforts are now underway to start on the process of replacing the three AGOR-23 Global vessels, along with other older ships in the fleet such as R/V *Kilo Moana* and R/V *Marcus G. Langseth*, as all of these ships have or are approaching their original or updated end of service lives. Many of the UNOLS institution advancement / government relations teams are working together to tell the story of the importance of the Academic Research Fleet to many aspects of U.S. life including the economy, workforce, supply chain, maritime domain, and much more. They are working closely with institutional leadership, legislative bodies (i.e. Congress, state legislatures) and federal entities to inform many about the criticality of the Academic Research fleet (ARF) to U.S. leadership in oceanographic research and other U.S. priorities (i.e. national defense, seabed characterization, underwater infrastructure, maritime workforce, restoring maritime dominance).

You might be asking – why can't ships be continuously updated through major overhauls rather than wholesale replacement – especially in times when research funding is tight?

Since all these ships were originally built – propulsion systems have changed dramatically in types, configurations and complexity offering more flexibility, efficiency and reduced emissions. In addition, science systems (i.e. winches, over the side handling systems, instrumentation, data collection) have also changed dramatically. It is not as straightforward as it may seem to retrofit such systems into older ships and their stability envelope with long established structural and special arrangement configurations, without having to make major changes to the ship's hull and structure. Often when doing so – compromises must be made that can end up limiting the impact of improvements expected with major upgrades. As a result, it can be more cost effective to design and build a completely new ship that optimizes the balance of many different operational and scientific needs into a well-integrated design. With this in mind – there is a strong focus now on recapitalization of much of the U.S. ARF. UNOLS continues to encourage institutions and operators to continue proactive outreach to inform the public about the importance of the incredible research you conduct and how critical it is to continue investing in the Academic Research Fleet so that the U.S. can continue to lead the world in oceanographic science.

For further information on how your institution can get involved / further involved in communicating the importance of the fleet to the U.S. and the need for investment in fleet recapitalization please contact doug@unols.org.

PDF versions of the Newsletter can be found here. To unsubscribe from UNOLS News, please reply to this email with the word "unsubscribe" in the body. Thank you!

Featured Photo

Sunset in La Jolla, CA. The Annual and Council meetings will be held in La Jolla this year on 9 & 10 Nov. Join us and see your own amazing sunset!

Upcoming Events

RVTEC Meeting
16 - 20 Nov 2026
Miami, FL

Annual Meeting & Council Meeting
09 & 10 Nov 2026
La Jolla, CA

DeSSC NUP & Community Meeting
05 & 06 Dec 2026
San Francisco, CA

MSROC Community Meeting
06 Dec 2026
San Francisco, CA

Winter AICC Meeting
13 & 14 Jan 2027
Seattle, WA

Did you know...

The NDSF Vehicle Dive Stats - current and historic - are now LIVE on the web - click here and scroll down to the Vehicle Dive Stats.