

Research Vessel Security – Committee Report by Capt. Daniel Schwartz

Along with virtually all sectors of the maritime business community, research vessel operators watched and waited for the security implications arising out of the terrorists attacks of 9/11/02 to impact their manner of doing business.

The UNOLS ships not are familiar with the requirements to provide 96-hour pre-arrival notice to the USCG before entering U.S. ports. (Some of the small vessel, local operators have not been affected by this procedure.) The U.S. Coast Guard has provided a new crew list format which requires definitive identification of nationality of persons on board--crew and scientists. Some UNOLS member institutions have been notifying Chief Scientists that, without exception, their U.S. participants need to obtain passports and that foreign participants must produce a valid multiple re-entry visa or a letter from U.S. INS stating that they will be allowed back into the country. (One Global class vessel was threatened with a severe fine--still pending--when she returned to a U.S. port after picking up, in Canada, a NOAA science party that included two foreign scientists who lacked this type of visa.) Last minute substitutions or addition of science party personnel have also become problematical as there may not be time to re-issue the crew-list part of the 96 hour notification in time to sail on schedule. Again, the best advice to PIs is that they include every possible participant (along with his or her passport information) on the pre-sailing science personnel list as it is relatively easy to strike out "no-shows."

The UNOLS Office created a Security web page with some excellent links to additional resources. These connections are to established organizations, such as the Office of Naval Intelligence, with information that is reliable if somewhat limited or occasionally dated. Unfortunately, since the beginnings of this war on terrorism, the number of "experts" and organizations offering advice, information, training, or goods and services has proliferated to the point where the quantity of information, both good and useless, is overwhelming. The UNOLS Office forwards the Worldwide Weekly Threat to Shipping announcements from ONI to research vessel operators who need that information.

Security has become an integral part of the UNOLS ship scheduling process. Schedulers were sent a series of messages, early on in the Letter-of-Intent generation period to scrutinize the areas of operation of pending cruises for possible transit through or work within high threat areas (referring to the WWTS notices to define these areas.) Operators whose ships might be exposed to these higher levels of threat were encouraged to contact their underwriters to ascertain if any restrictions were in place regarding insurance coverage: This information was shared among the UNOLS operators whose ships undertake distant missions. Finally, Mr. Charles Dragonette of the Office of Naval Intelligence attended our July Ship Scheduling Mission both to brief the attendees (schedulers and agency program managers) and to sit in on the discussions and familiarize himself with the UNOLS model for mission planning.

A plethora of new training providers have emerged with advertising for their services on the pages of virtually every maritime industry publication (Marine Log, Marine News, Work Boat, Pacific Mariner, etc.) While piracy remains a growth industry, with certain areas such as the Indonesian Archipelago and the coast of Columbia and Nigeria standing out as particularly dangerous places to operate, the line between the threat of pirates and the possibility of terrorism remains fuzzy. IMO (the folks who brought us ISM) is presently working on a new, international regime for vessel security. Rumored to be included in what will certainly become a new treaty-endorsed operational requirement will be the establishment of a "vessel security officer" for every ship over a certain tonnage, with defined standards of training and assigned tasks associated with the title. We should stay tuned as this process moves forward. Meanwhile, the MITAGS union-operated facility in Maryland offers some courses leading to a similar certification, as required by the MSC fleet for their civilian mariners. Other, credible training resources

will gradually be identified--a process of separating the wheat from the chaff.

Security will be an ongoing topic of discussion at this year's RVOC meeting--and most certainly for many more in the future. Clearly, this is no time to drop our guard when dispatching our ships on projects that include work along distant littorals and calls in foreign ports. We will continue to provide the best information available to our schedulers and marine superintendents as it becomes available.