

## **These days Maritime Security is everyone's business**

By Wayne Spivak  
National Press Corps  
United States Coast Guard Auxiliary

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is a term you may see more and more in the press, at your marina, or in your boating magazines and newspapers.

MDA is concerned with all people and things in the maritime environment. In this context, "security" means more than it usually does.

When you think of security, you may think of being safe from crime, or safe from financial ruin. In MDA, security means more; it means being safe in a marine environment where people and property are secure from malicious action, and the natural environment and the national economy are kept safe.

### **Safety**

Safety is the key word here. The United States Coast Guard wants the recreational boating public to be safe. This is why the Coast Guard and the Auxiliary promote Vessel Safety Checks (VSCs), boating education, and wearing of personal flotation devices (PFDs).

How does this relate to MDA?

Because if we are able to reduce the need for Search-and-Rescue activities (we call prevention programs "pre-SAR missions"), the Coast Guard and Auxiliary will have more assets available for security and other missions, such as fisheries, migrant interdiction, environmental safety, etc. Mishaps that *can* be prevented *should* be prevented. A twenty-minute VSC can catch problems that, if uncorrected, could cause your vessel to be involved in a mishap.

I've seen it when I've performed VSCs for the boating public. While doing a VSC at a local boat ramp, I noticed that a sea cock was missing from a boat's fish locker. The locker was already filling up with water, and the boater and I figured that in another twenty minutes, his boat would have begun to sink.

### **Direct Public Involvement**

Boating safety courses teach the boating public about operating safely. Safe boaters don't need to call on the Coast Guard to rescue them. Safe boaters have the opportunity to spend more time enjoying their sport, and to be assets to the Coast Guard by becoming part of the America's Waterway Watch (<http://www.americaswaterwaywatch.org>).

Those with more interest in helping the Coast Guard can even become Coast Guard Auxiliarists (<http://www.cgaux.org>).

America's Waterway Watch is a program similar to Neighborhood Watch, in which people who live, work, or play in our maritime domain keep a look out for the unusual. Why you, the average boater? Because you live there, work there, and play there day in and day out. You know what is normal and what is not.

When something just doesn't look right, make a phone call to the Coast Guard or local law enforcement. Call the National Response Center at 800-424-8802 or 877-24WATCH. *If there is immediate danger to life or property, call 9-1-1, or call the Coast Guard on Marine Channel 16.*

Members of America's Waterway Watch **never** get involved past the phone call. There are no applications to fill out, uniforms to buy, or meetings to attend. It's simply keeping a lookout for things that don't quite fit in your maritime neighborhood.

### **So What is Suspicious?**

- ▶ People appearing to be engaged in surveillance of any kind (taking notes, shooting video or photos, making sketches, or asking questions).
- ▶ Unattended vessels or vehicles in unusual locations.
- ▶ Lights flashing between boats.
- ▶ Unusual diving activity.
- ▶ Unusual number of people on board.
- ▶ Unusual night operations.
- ▶ Recovering or tossing items into/onto the waterway or shoreline.
- ▶ Operating in or passing through an area that does not typically have such activity.
- ▶ Fishing/hunting in locations not typically used for those activities.
- ▶ Missing fencing or lighting near sensitive locations.
- ▶ Anchoring in an area not typically used for anchorage.
- ▶ Transfer of people or things between ships or between ship and shore outside of port.
- ▶ Anyone operating in an aggressive manner.
- ▶ Individuals establishing businesses or roadside food stands near sensitive locations.
- ▶ Small planes flying over critical locations.
- ▶ People attempting to buy or rent fishing or recreational vessels with cash for short-term, undefined use.

Help us to help you. Keep alert. Get a free Vessel Safety Check (<http://safetyseal.net/>), take a safe boating course ([http://nws.cgaux.org/visitors/pe\\_visitor/index.html](http://nws.cgaux.org/visitors/pe_visitor/index.html)), and remember "You're in Command" (<http://www.uscgboating.org/command/initiative.htm>).

To learn more about trailering and boating safety, why not take a boating safety course? For more information about safe boating courses, please contact the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary at [www.cgaux.org](http://www.cgaux.org) or call **1-877-875-6296**.

The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary is the uniformed volunteer component of Team Coast Guard, founded in 1939 by an Act of Congress as the US Coast Guard Reserves and re-designated the Auxiliary in 1941. The 31,000 volunteer members (men and women) donate thousands of hours in support of Coast Guard missions.