



**TESTIMONY OF CAPTAIN JAMES WHITEHEAD  
SECTOR COMMANDER AND CAPTAIN OF THE PORT IN HOUSTON-GALVESTON**

**HOUSTON PORT SECURITY**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT,  
INVESTIGATIONS & MANAGEMENT**

**AUGUST 24, 2011**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and distinguished guests, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss port security in the Houston-Galveston area.

As the Sector Commander and Captain of the Port in Houston-Galveston, I serve as the region's Federal Maritime Security Coordinator, the Federal On-Scene Coordinator, and the Officer-in-Charge Marine Inspection. The Sector focuses on two major operational processes – PREVENTION and RESPONSE – in support of three fundamental roles: Maritime Safety; Maritime Security; and Maritime Stewardship. As the Commandant, ADM Robert Papp, has stated, "We protect those on the sea; we protect America from threats delivered by sea; and we protect the sea itself."

We accomplish these fundamental roles by cooperating with our maritime partners through three committees: the Houston-Galveston Navigation Safety Advisory Committee; the Area Maritime Security Committee; and the Central Texas Coastal Area Committee.

These committees represent robust, active collaboration between a wide range of Federal, state and local stakeholders from law enforcement, industry, port authorities, shippers, agents, and educational institutions, among others. Members from all three committees meet, train, and exercise together regularly to develop and refine plans, address issues of concern, disseminate information, and share ideas and best practices. The largest of the three committees is the Area Maritime Security Committee which was chartered in 2004 and now includes over 400 members-at-large. The committee has active working groups in the areas of facility security, intelligence, law enforcement, grants, public affairs/outreach, and joint training and exercises. The work is continuous, and progress in the various areas is reported to the membership during quarterly meetings.

In Houston, we routinely conduct integrated operations with our city, county, state and Federal Law Enforcement partners. The joint agency Houston Area Maritime Operations Center is a prime example of the type of coordination directed in the Maritime Operations Coordination Plan recently signed by the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). These operations typically involve the Harris County Sheriff's Office and local city Police Department marine divisions as well as CBP, ICE, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives and other Federal partners.

This concept will continue to grow and expand across the entire Sector in the coming months, as our implementation plan takes effect. Efforts are also underway with our neighboring Sectors to align and streamline our operations across all jurisdictional boundaries.

We also rely heavily on our port partners to be the "eyes on the water." With an average of 350 daily tow movements in the Houston Ship Channel and more than 100 waterfront facilities with a vigilant security presence, marine industry stakeholders are well positioned to recognize when things are out of the ordinary and serve as a valuable resource by diligently reporting breaches of security and suspicious activity. We also receive reports on fraudulent use of the Transportation Worker Identification Card, and work closely with our local enforcement and legal agencies such as the Harris County District Attorney to ensure these cases are prosecuted.

In terms of maritime traffic and cargo, the Port of Houston ranks first in the United States for number of ship arrivals and second in total cargo tonnage. Houston handles over 50 percent of all containerized cargo arriving at Gulf of Mexico ports. Additionally, more than 50 percent of the gasoline used in the United States is refined in this area. With more than 100 petrochemical waterfront facilities, Houston is the second largest such complex in the world. Major corporations such as Exxon-Mobil, Shell, Saudi ARAMCO, Stolt Nielson, Odfjell USA Inc., Sea River and Kirby Marine have national or international headquarters in Houston.

In recognition of the significance of Houston's shipping activity, the State of Texas formally established the Houston Ship Channel Security District (HSCSD) in 2010. The HSCSD represents a unique public-private partnership formed to improve security and safety for facilities, employees and communities surrounding the Houston Ship Channel. The Coast Guard played an instrumental role in the formation of the HSCSD, and continues to work closely with the HSCSD to ensure alignment of priorities and unity of effort. As Sector Commander, I am a member of the HSCSD Advisory Council and Sector Port Security specialists attend HSCSD board meetings. The district provides oversight of comprehensive and cost-effective security solutions, leveraging more than \$30 million in Federal Port Security grants along with \$4 million in annual member assessments to install technology and security infrastructure and provide funds for specific security projects, maintenance and operational services.

The Port of Houston accommodates a large number of tankers carrying crude oil, refined products and chemical cargoes. With approximately 9,600 deep draft ship arrivals each year, the Coast Guard maintains a very extensive Port State Control program in the Houston-Galveston area. The Port State Control program ensures the safe carriage of hazardous materials in bulk. Because over 90 percent of cargo bound for the United States is carried by foreign-flagged ships, this national program prevents operation of substandard foreign ships in U.S. waters.

The Sector also makes excellent use of its robust Vessel Traffic Service (VTS). The VTS's primary role is facilitating safe vessel transits in the waterways and ports along the Houston Ship Channel. The VTS cameras, Automatic Identification System (AIS) feeds, remote radar observation capability, and radio communications, also provide an additional layer of security. In addition to the VTS resources in the Houston Ship Channel, Sector Houston-Galveston has access to feeds from three AIS receivers mounted on off-shore oil platforms, which provide heightened awareness of activities in the maritime domain.

Mr. Chairman, threats and vulnerabilities will always exist. But through the active involvement of hundreds of partners who are directly involved with or impacted by the maritime industry in the Houston-Galveston area of responsibility, this Sector is committed to deterring incidents before they happen and is well-prepared to respond to them should they occur.

In 1787, Alexander Hamilton, in Federalist Paper Number 12 laid the foundation for the modern Coast Guard when he noted that “[a] few armed vessels, judiciously stationed at the entrances of our ports, might at a small expense, be made useful sentinels of our laws.” We’re proud of that legacy and our role in continued national strategy to keep our homeland secure. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.