

Washington, Nov 14, 2006

Commandant Thad W. Allen
Docket Management Facility (USCG-2006-25767)
U.S. Department of Transportation, Room PL-401
400 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20590-0001

RE: Proposed Rulemaking to Establish Permanent Great Lakes Safety Zones

Dear Commandant Allen:

The events of Sept. 11, 2001, required the U.S. Coast Guard to increase the scope of its activity in recognition of the new threats that America faces.

Its responsibilities have risen above enforcing maritime law and protecting commercial shipping and recreational boaters. On Sept. 12, 2001 we needed it to stand ready to respond to terrorist activity against targets such as nuclear power plants, tourist destinations or buildings like the Sears Tower in Chicago or the Renaissance Center in Detroit.

In February the Coast Guard had to fly in Port Security teams to provide security on the Detroit River during the Super Bowl because nobody was certified locally to man the guns.

Coast Guard personnel need to regularly train to ensure that they stand at a constant state of readiness. We cannot expect them to rush in response to a crisis if they have not adequately prepared.

I approach the issue as if it was an insurance policy. They need to properly train, but I hope that a situation never arises in which they need to respond.

With that stated, the Coast Guard acted very poorly in communicating its plans to conduct live-fire training exercises on the Great Lakes. The August announcement in the Federal Register caught many people, including myself, very much by surprise.

I appreciate that the Coast Guard was willing to extend the public comment period and hold public meetings to more fully inform the public about its proposal.

Residents have every right to harbor reservations about the impact on the environment and potential risks to recreational and commercial activity on the Great Lakes.

I suggest that the Coast Guard consider the following alternatives as it compiles a final

plan:

- Consolidating the proposed 34 zones into a smaller number of locations.
- Examining alternatives to lead-based bullets that pose less of a risk to the environment.
- Establishing parameters on the timing of the exercises as possibly before May 15 and after Sept. 15 to minimize the impact to recreational boaters and commercial operations such as the S.S. Badger in Ludington and the Lake Express High Speed Ferry in Muskegon.
- Expand the scope of the five-year Preliminary Health Risk Assessment to a more comprehensive long-term environmental impact study.
- Develop a strategy of notifying communities and commercial and recreational traffic when live exercises are scheduled. The strategy should include press releases to local newspapers, radio and television stations and notification to local units of government and law enforcement, in addition to announcements over maritime radio frequencies.

As we move forward, the Coast Guard should make every effort to fully engage the public about its training exercises. I encourage it to aggressively work to ensure the safety of the boating public and commercial shipping, as well as limit the impact on the environment.

I look forward to the final proposal and working together to ensure the safety and security of the Great Lakes region.

Sincerely,

Pete Hoekstra

Member of Congress