

Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee

Meeting Summary

April 26, 2024

12:30pm-3:30pm (AKDT)

BP Energy Center

91 Sterling Highway, Homer AK 99603

Committee Members Present:

Capt. Justin Theriot, At-Large – Alternate (online)
Steve “Vinnie” Catalano, CIRCAC – Primary
Shaylon Cochran, CIRCAC – Alternate (online)
Vicente “Ben” Cruz, Dry Cargo Ship Operators – Alternate
Rachel Lord, Environmental – Primary (online)
Suzann Speckman, Environmental – Alternate (online)
Capt. Brad Kroon, Harbor Tug Operators
Bill Wolverton, Offshore Oil Production – Primary
David Griffin, Port MacKenzie – Primary (online)
Steve Ribuffo, Port of Alaska – Primary
Todd Paxton, Response Organization – Primary
Luke Hasenbank, Ship Agents – Primary (online)
Andrew Mew, Ship Agents – Alternate (online)
Capt. Ian Maury, SWAPA – Primary *HSC Vice-Chair*
Capt. John Stewart, SWAPA – Alternate (online)
Capt. Mark Maxim, Tanker Operators – Primary (online)

Committee Members Absent:

Bryan Crisp, At-Large – Primary
David Martin, Commercial Fishing – Primary
Capt. Erik Velsko, Commercial Fishing – Alternate
Frank Smith, Dry Cargo Ship Operators – Primary
Ronnie Poole, Port of Alaska – Alternate
Bryan Hawkins, Port of Homer – Primary
Garrett St. Clair, Recreational Boaters – Primary

Todd Duke, Salvage Organization – Primary
Bryan Baker, Small Passenger Vessel Operators – Primary
Mark Theriault, Tug & Barge Operators – Primary

Managing Board Present:

Mayor Peter Micciche, President (online)
Capt. Paul Mehler, HSC Chair
Capt. Ron Ward, Vice President
Mike Munger, Secretary/Treasurer
Capt. Jeff Brue, Member (online)

Ex Officio:

CDR John Downing, USCG (Chief of Prevention) (online)
MST2 Elizabeth Burges, USCG (Waterways Management)
David Blossom, ADEC
Capt. Steve White, AK Marine Exchange
Capt. Chris Coutu, AK Marine Exchange (online)

Other:

Nate Vreeland, AK Chadux Network
Capt. Mason Reed, Matson
Hannah Charrouf, Pearson Consulting
Kari Anderson, AVTEC
Haley Griffin, Nuka Research
Sierra Fletcher, Nuka Research

Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Captain Paul Mehler, HSC Chair, reviewed the agenda and called the twelfth meeting of the Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee to order at 12:35 pm (AKDT).

Captain Mehler led the Pledge of Allegiance, and reviewed meeting protocols and general meeting housekeeping items.

Haley Griffin led introductions for meeting attendees.

Approval of Agenda

Motion Todd Paxton, Steve Ribuffo to approve the agenda as prepared. Motion passes by no objection.

Meeting Summary October 18, 2023

Motion Vinnie Catalano, Todd Paxton to approve the October 18, 2023, meeting summary as prepared. Motion passes by no objection.

Round Table Committee Member Updates

Mr. Catalano provided an update to the group on his attendance at the 2024 National Harbor Safety Committee Conference. He reported that Vice Admiral Pete Gautier was the keynote speaker, James Prazak presented on the history of the National Harbor Safety Committee (HSC), and overall, the conference was well attended by USCG representatives. An in-depth discussion ensued that day around the process and challenges of arranging a National HSC conference, as this was the first completely HSC member-organized conference. There were several panel discussions, among them involving federal perspectives on challenges within the Marine Transportation System and how HSC's may address these challenges, best practices of HSC management for shared expertise and improved communication across groups, and a discussion of real-world examples of initiatives started by HSC's that have resulted in successful management of congested waterways.

Mr. Catalano concluded his report by recommending that the CIHSC continue to attend future conferences to learn from the national context. Captain Mehler expressed his appreciation for Mr. Catalano's attendance at the conference.

No actionable items arose from the discussion.

Ex-Officio Updates

CDR John Downing reported that the U.S. Coast Guard District 17 is in the process of updating regulations regarding Certificates of Inspection (COI) for Vessels of Opportunity (VOO). They will provide updates to the CIHSC during this process.

Managing Board Report

Mayor Micciche reported that the Managing Board met on the 9th of April. At that meeting, the Board approved a thank you letter for Captain Mark Nielsen, reviewed Captain Ian Maury and Captain John Stewart's resumes, and appointed them to the HSC Vice-Chair and SWAPA alternate positions respectively. The Board is looking for more individuals to fill the alternate seats on the Committee. The primary membership is currently in good shape. Mayor Micciche asked primary Committee members present to identify and nominate individuals to fill these vacant alternate seats.

HSC Chair Report

Captain Mehler expressed his excitement for the Committee to be able to listen to presentations from Captain Steve White, Dr. Barrett Salisbury, and Dave Snider. He reported drafting a letter of appreciation for Mark Nielsen as a founding Board member of the CIHSC, and that the approved version of the Harbor Safety Plan (HSP) is posted on the website. He thanked Mr. Catalano and others that contributed to the HSP updates. The Marine Fire Fighting (MFF) plan is another significant effort in which updates and improvements are being implemented to include in the HSP. He noted that the HSP is a living document, and improvements will continue to be made in the future.

Captain Mehler also mentioned that the Board is working to promote the Committee, including via a LinkedIn page. Last year's goals were to update the MFF plan and encouraged members to share training opportunities. Captain Mehler seeks input from Committee members on what the CIHSC's 2024 goals should be. He also reported on wrapping up the 2023-2024 ice season a few weeks prior to the meeting, and that a hotwash will be conducted on May 10th. He advised meetings participants

to anticipate revisions to the Ice Guidelines, and that he will be looking for input from the Navigation Committee.

Workgroup Reports

Navigation Work Group

Captain Ron Ward reported that there has not been a work group meeting since the Under Keel Clearance issue was resolved and incorporated into the HSP, and the only agenda item still currently remaining is the appointment of an individual to the newly vacant work group Chair position. He suggested that Captain Maury could take this role on since he is now the primary SWAPA seat. Captain Maury nominated Captain Stewart to fill the Navigation work group chair seat. There were no objections from other voting members.

Marine Fire Fighting/Salvage Work Groups

There were no updates for these work groups, as Todd Duke and Daniel Payne were absent from the meeting to aid in the recovery operations of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, MD.

Harbor Safety Plan Work Group

Mr. Catalano reported that the HSP work group will be scheduling a meeting and working to add a Tools and References section into the HSP. The Committee will be contacted for review, input, and approval when changes are made. He mentioned the issue of whale strikes discussed at the last HSC meeting and that he reached out to NOAA for an update on the status of the issue. He stated that he will report back to the Committee when he receives a response.

Captain Mehler added context to the topic, stating that there was concern expressed over whale strikes at the last meeting and questions on whether the CIHSC would be looking into the issue. The HSC asked NOAA to share information on the topic regarding what has been done in the region and what is currently being done in other parts of the country. It is a goal to have this information shared at the Fall HSC meeting. He reiterated the importance of outreach and constantly improving Committee operations.

Facilitator's Report

Haley Griffin shared the current list of vacancies with participants and the process for which members can follow if they would like to recommend someone to apply for a position. She asked the Committee members to send suggestions for presentations at future meetings, information members would like to include on the Resources page of the CIHSC website, and any recommended updates to the website to continue to make it more user-friendly. Captain Brad Kroon suggested that an individual from the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers could present on their activities in Cook Inlet at a future HSC meeting.

Presentations

Marine Exchange of Alaska Operations Brief

Captain Steve White, Executive Director of the Marine Exchange of Alaska (MXAK), began his presentation by highlighting the rapid changes occurring among the region's waterways and their users, including the weather, size and number of vessels transiting the area. He expressed his appreciation for the leadership of the HSC and provided an overview of the history of Marine Exchanges, noting that MXAK is the newest Marine Exchange organization in the nation. Primary services of Marine Exchange Alaska include designating marine safety sites, 24/7 monitoring, data analysis, and supporting regulatory compliance among vessels. MXAK has installed and maintains over 60 weather stations and is responsible for a comprehensive vessel tracking system with more than 150 AIS receivers located across Alaska. Captain White emphasized that many of Alaska's roads are the waterways, and they serve critical purposes to the nation's economy and security.

While an incident can leave devastating impacts, Alaska's unique geography and size can make these impacts even more devastating and complex.

Captain White then highlighted the components of MXAK's marine safety sites, which include weather sensors, AIS receivers and transceivers, DSC receivers, VHF-FM transceivers, tidal current sensors, and sea surface cameras. While gaps remain in VHF-FM coverage across Alaska, MXAK added coverage for 13 sites in 2023 and aims to have 54 sites total established by the end of 2024, including better VHF and AIS ATON coverage in Cook Inlet. MXAK aims to install more mobile marine safety sites on vessels, which includes a weather station and allows MXAK to receive the last 24 hours of data local to where a vessel has travelled and NWS to incorporate the data into weather models. MXAK is also testing a new sensor to help predict icing and will eventually begin transmitting hazardous marine weather information as well. Through MXAK, there is the opportunity to manage sea traffic to deconflict maritime uses, provide environmental data, minimize impacts to wildlife, assist vessels in distress, and prevent disasters. Visit <https://www.mxak.org> to learn more about Marine Exchange Alaska's operations.

New Insights into Upper Cook Inlet Tsunami Hazards

Dr. Barrett Salisbury with the Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys (DGGS) presented the results of a recent study of tsunami potential in Upper Cook Inlet. He provided participants with an overview of the geophysical components of tsunamigenic earthquakes in Alaska, detailing the movement of Earth's tectonic plates in the region. Major earthquakes have occurred along the entire Aleutian chain since 1906, and in 2023 alone over 45,000 earthquakes of different magnitudes were recorded across Alaska. The concern of an earthquake causing a tsunami in this region lies in a significant amount of energy and pressure building up along the subduction zone and then being released when the North American plate slips into a new position. He referenced the M 9.2 1964 Great Alaska Earthquake, the second largest earthquake ever recorded that caused a tsunami, standing waves, and cost 106 lives and \$84 million in damage.

Dr. Salisbury talked about the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program (NTHMP) and the three main components: hazard assessment, mitigation, and warning guidance. Dr. Salisbury's work in the hazard assessment and mitigation components of the Alaska Tsunami Program has included studying potential sources of tsunamis, assessing fault rupture possibilities, assembling bathymetry and topographic data, comparing models to historically observed tsunami data, and numerically modeling inundation extents using hypothetical scenarios. So far, inundation maps have been created for 63 of 76 identified at-risk communities. He reviewed various hypothetical scenarios in which an earthquake could cause a tsunami to reach Upper Cook Inlet and spoke to the significant influence the stage of a tidal cycle would have on inundation levels. A tsunami arrival on a flood tide will have significantly higher impacts than one that occurs before low tide.

Dr. Salisbury shared a link that displays tsunami inundation maps for various locations in Southern Alaska and the maximum potential depths of water that would occur over dry land based on various tsunami scenarios (<https://tsunami.alaska.edu>). He emphasized that mariners know the waterways better than anyone, and if an unusually low tide is ever seen, to immediately seek higher ground as the water will eventually return and waves will continue to occur for hours after an earthquake.

Preparing for the Next Tsunami

Dave Snider, Tsunami Warning Coordinator at NOAA's National Tsunami Warning Center presented on the warning guidance component of the NTHMP and spoke to the systems in place to warn areas that may be affected by a tsunami after an earthquake, landslide, volcanic eruption, or other event occurs that causes significant water disruption. He noted that while the 1964 earthquake did create a tsunami, its effects in Upper Cook Inlet were masked by the low tide. Another significant earthquake has the potential to cause a similar tsunami and reach low lying areas in the Upper Inlet

if the tide is instead rising. The existing tsunami warning systems have been created to monitor seismic activity and earthquakes, which cause approximately 85% of tsunamis. In Alaska however, there is high potential for a tsunami to instead be triggered by landslides, a phenomenon that requires a significant amount of equipment to monitor and understand. Mr. Snider reviewed historic cases of earthquakes and landslides and stated that the film industry often paints the wrong picture of tsunamis. He emphasized that instead of a single wave, tsunamis present as a series of waves that appear as large surges of water and even tsunamis from distant sources can pose dangerous.

Mr. Snider continued by touching on the various types of infrastructure damage that has been caused by tsunamis in the past, including damage to buildings, harbors, vessels, docks, electrical systems, mooring systems, etc. Economic costs from loss of property and assets to delays of imported goods have had a significant impact on entire regions, and given the size and complexity of Alaska's geography, these effects could be heightened if an incident were to occur. Mr. Snider listed warning signs of a tsunami, stating that if you feel a strong or extended earthquake, see a sudden change in ocean water levels, or hear a loud roar from the ocean, to immediately seek higher ground or move inland. He then reviewed the alert system of the National Tsunami Warning Center and the various types of alerts to expect, including a tsunami information statement, watch, advisory, or warning. Work is being done within the Warning Center to make the meaning of these alerts clearer when disseminated.

Mr. Snider emphasized the uncertainty that comes with tsunami forecasting, and that observation networks in the form of seismic observations, underwater pressure sensors, and tide gauges are in place to inform tsunami alerts. Alerts are initially sent out to a wider area before more information is collected and subsequent alerts are disseminated to smaller areas that will actually be impacted. Official tsunami warnings are broadcast through radio, tv, telephones, wireless emergency alerts, and outdoor sirens. He stated that there are additional ways to stay informed throughout events and encouraged participants to look into local resources. Mr. Snider's focus is collaborating with groups like the CIHSC because the NTHMP brings together federal and state partners but does not include industry players. He also encouraged participation in the upcoming PACIFEX Pacific domestic coastal partners National Tsunami Warning Center exercise on May 23rd.

Captain Ward asked about the tsunami risk in Barry Arm (in Prince William Sound), to which Mr. Snider and Dr. Salisbury replied that the concern is that seasonally wet periods to destabilize this area and cause a landslide. There are researchers monitoring the amount of water moving through this area throughout to be able to identify abnormal levels. For an earthquake to trigger a landslide in this region, the earthquake must be shallow and local to the area. Given that this region is frequented by cruise vessels among others, significant consequences would result from a landslide/tsunami in this area. Luke Hasenbank stated that he can pass this information to his contacts in the cruise ship industry. Captain Theriot asked about the effects of funding being removed from the NTHMP. Dr. Salisbury replied that all of the work being done will have to stop in 2025 if the funding to the mitigation program is cut. Mr. Snider encouraged members to write a letter of support for the program to continue to receive funding. Captain Mehler stated that the Board will draft a letter and circulate it to HSC members for approval.

Public/Final Comments

Ms. Sierra Fletcher and Mr. Catalano spoke to the efforts of the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council (CIRCAC) to update its Cook Inlet vessel traffic report for 2024, and encouraged Committee members to reach out if they have questions, suggestions for useful maps and statistics, would like to review the draft report or receive the final report. This report will include data from 2021 through 2023. The Cook Inlet Vessel Traffic Report (2011 – 2020) can be found here: <https://www.circac.org/wp-content/uploads/220307-CI-Traffic-Report-Fnl.pdf>.

Review Action Items & Set Next Meeting

Captain Mehler and Ms. Griffin outlined the action items.

- ❖ Committee members will share training opportunities and goals for 2024 with the HSC.
- ❖ Committee members will share recommendations for future presentations with the HSC.
- ❖ Committee members will identify individuals interested in alternate seats on the HSC.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will send the thank you card and letter of appreciation to Captain Mark Nielsen.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will reach out to a contact at the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and invite them to give a presentation at the Fall HSC meeting.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will forward Ice Guidelines language to the Navigation work group when updated.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will work with the Managing Board and Committee to update the HSC's public contact list.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will work with the Managing Board to draft a letter of support for NOAA to continue funding the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will share the list of Navigation work group contacts with Captain Stewart.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will send a Doodle Poll to members to solicit availability for the Fall HSC meeting.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will share the summary and materials shared during the meeting with the HSC.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will share the meeting presentations on the CIHSC website.

Next Meeting

Captain Mehler stated that the next Committee meeting will likely be held in the September – October timeframe of Fall 2024.

Adjourn

Captain Paul Mehler thanked everyone for attending. Captain Kroon and Mr. Catalano motioned to adjourn, and Captain Mehler adjourned the meeting at 3:24 pm (AKDT).