



NVIC 01-25
January 13, 2025

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

Subj: GUIDANCE FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT OF COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH LOCAL HARBOR SAFETY COMMITTEES

Ref: (a) United States Coast Guard Maritime Commerce Strategic Outlook ([October 2018](#))
(b) United States Coast Guard Strategy ([October 2022](#))
(c) Implementation Plan for the Maritime Commerce Strategic Outlook ([February 2021](#))
(d) National Strategy on the Marine Transportation System ([March 2023](#))
(e) Committee Management Policies and Procedures, COMDTINST 5420.37 (series)

1. **PURPOSE.** To provide guidance to public and private stakeholders participating in local Harbor Safety Committees (HSCs) in order to improve and enhance local coordination of Marine Transportation System (MTS) issues, such as ports and waterways safety, efficiency, security, mobility, and environmental protection. This Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular (NVIC) is intended to encourage existing HSCs to review their current state and consider whether opportunities exist to update or revise HSC practices to improve local coordination. This NVIC identifies expectations and describes limitations for the types of support the USCG can provide to local HSCs. This NVIC captures characteristics of the nation's most mature and effective HSCs, which are recommended for adoption nationwide as standard business practices, and seeks to inspire the development of HSCs where they do not currently exist.

2. **DIRECTIVES AFFECTED.** NVIC 01-00, *Guidance for the establishment and development of harbor safety committees under the Marine Transportation System (MTS) initiative*, is hereby cancelled.

3. **HARBOR SAFETY COMMITTEE DEFINED.**

a. Reference (a) defines HSCs as “the principal building blocks in the National MTS Coordinating Structure. Membership is typically comprised of representatives of government agencies, maritime labor and industry organizations, environmental groups, and other public interest groups, to the extent that they are active in a particular port.” Although titles vary by locality, for the purposes of this guidance, a port MTS coordinating body or committee will be referred to as a “Harbor Safety Committee.” HSC is used as a term of convenience; it is not necessary that existing or new committees be called HSCs or that these groups concern themselves solely with safety. HSC responsibilities include recommending actions to improve the safety, efficiency, security, mobility, and environmental protection of a port or waterway. HSCs do not have any

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

independent regulatory or enforcement authority, but can coordinate recommendations for actions by agencies that do have those authorities.

b. HSCs do not operate as maritime associations where members must pay fees in order to fully participate.

4. DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN HARBOR SAFETY COMMITTEES AND OTHER LOCAL COMMITTEES¹. The USCG primarily engages with port stakeholders through three local committees: HSCs, Area Committees, and Area Maritime Security Committees. There may be overlap in the membership of these groups, but each committee has a distinct focus.

a. Area Committees. Local Area Committees mandated by the Clean Water Act as amended by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA) were in place prior to the Interagency Committee for the Maritime Transportation System's 1999 recommendation that U.S. ports establish HSCs. Under the direction of the pre-designated Federal On-Scene Coordinator, a responsibility generally delegated to each Captain of the Port (COTP), the Area Committees are required to develop and maintain an Area Contingency Plan for oil and hazardous substances spill response, to include marine firefighting contingencies, for a designated coastal area. Both Area Committees and HSCs are viable forums for addressing environmental interests within ports or waterways, but in many regions they address different aspects of environmental protection.

b. Area Maritime Security Committees (AMSCs). The Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002 (MTSA) established each COTP as the Federal Maritime Security Coordinator (FMSC) for their area of responsibility. Pursuant to MTSA and the Safe Port Act of 2006, the FMSC is required to oversee an AMSC that maintains a suite of plans, including the Area Maritime Security Plan, the Salvage Response Plan, the MTS Recovery Plan, and various annexes (including cybersecurity). AMSCs serve as collaborative forums for government and industry partners to work together to enhance security in the maritime environment. Membership is restricted and vetted² due to the security sensitive topics discussed during AMSC meetings.

c. Harbor Safety Committees (HSCs). These groups focus broadly on local coordination of MTS issues to include the safety, efficiency, security, mobility, and environmental protection of our nation's ports and waterways. To that end, HSCs bring together a much broader, more diverse group of stakeholders for their discussions. Additionally, it is important to remember that unlike Area Committees and AMSCs, which are statutorily

¹ This section focuses on local committees that occur within all USCG Captain of the Port (COTP) zones. In addition, the nation has Port Readiness Committees, which are chaired by the local COTP and focus on defense readiness. These committees only exist within 18 designated strategic commercial seaports. See also <https://www.maritime.dot.gov/ports/national-port-readiness-network-nprn>. In areas prone to hurricanes, it is common for the USCG to manage Port Coordination Teams, which are activated in advance of and during the response to hurricanes. Many HSC members are also engaged as part of local Port Coordination Teams, and in some cases the local HSC has a subcommittee dedicated to supporting this function (e.g., Heavy Weather Advisory Groups).

² Vetted as per guidance in NVIC 09-02 (series) Enclosure One.

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

mandated and managed by the USCG, HSCs are voluntary organizations run and led by local port partners.

5. BACKGROUND.

a. The United States is a maritime nation. Our way of life depends on safe, open, and reliable access to the oceans. Our waterways, coasts, and seas play a vital role in American recreation, commerce, transportation, and defense.

b. The United States' maritime domain is varied and immense, consisting of an integrated network of 25,000 miles of coastal and inland waterways, 361 ports, 124 shipyards, 3,500 maritime facilities, 20,000 bridges, 50,000 federal aids to navigation, and 95,000 miles of shoreline that interconnect with critical highways, railways, airports, and pipelines. The U.S. marine environment also includes about 4.5 million square miles of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic Oceans, Gulf of Mexico, and Great Lakes. The U.S. relies on the safe, secure, and free flow of legitimate global commerce on the high seas and through the EEZ to and from U.S. ports and waterways. References (a)-(c) encompass USCG strategies, which guide the USCG's efforts to facilitate lawful trade and travel on secure waterways.

c. As outlined in reference (d), "the MTS is composed of an array of interdependent physical parts, including waterways, coastal and inland ports and terminals, vessels, and intermodal connectors, as well as the companies, organizations, and workers that use, operate, and maintain the system." The National MTS Coordinating Structure that supports this system is comprised of two levels – local and national. With respect to HSCs, the two levels of the National MTS Coordinating System are linked through federal agencies, notably the USCG, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Maritime Administration, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, who participate at both levels, as well as through the HSC National Steering Team.

(1) At the local level, HSCs provide the forum for the human element of the MTS – the companies, organizations, and workers – to engage in discussions to ensure harmony in their efforts to use, operate, and maintain the system.

(2) At the national level, federal agencies engage through the U.S. Committee on the Marine Transportation System (CMTS). The CMTS is a cabinet-level, interdepartmental committee with responsibility for assessing the adequacy of the MTS; promoting the integration of the MTS with other modes of transportation and other uses of the marine environment; and coordinating, improving the coordination of, and making recommendations with regard to federal policies that impact the MTS.

d. Growing demand for maritime commerce has directly resulted in the increased size and draft of ships, reach of ship to shore gantry cranes, widths and depths of shipping channels, and complexity of facilities and port operations. At the same time we are

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

observing increased demand for traditional uses, our waterways must also accommodate newer and emerging uses (e.g., space activities, autonomous systems, offshore renewable energy, aquaculture) and still allow for public recreation – all within a finite space. The increased usage within finite waterways has emphasized the importance of collaboration among port stakeholders. Growth in the maritime sector must be carefully managed. The nation’s economic success hinges on our ability to maximize the capacity of our waterways – ensuring the efficient movement of maritime cargo in and out of our ports, while preserving natural resources and maintaining safety and security.

e. The complexity and challenges facing America’s waterways require government agencies at all levels and private stakeholders with maritime interests to work together to achieve common goals and continuously improve unity of effort. References (a) and (b) outline the criticality of continuing to strengthen cooperative partnerships and bolster coordination and engagement with maritime stakeholder groups, including local HSCs, to address the complexity and challenges facing the MTS. The USCG is committed to strengthening partnerships and enhancing maritime governance through deliberate, coordinated, and impactful engagement.

6. DISCUSSION.

a. No single entity within a port can address all current or forthcoming challenges on its own; coordination, communication, and collaboration locally among stakeholders is needed. HSCs have long been recognized as a key to safe, efficient, and environmentally sound operations in our nation’s ports and waterways, as they are often the only local forum available for facility operators and port users to meet and address mutual safety, mobility, and environmental protection issues.

b. As complexity increases, so does uncertainty and ambiguity. HSCs have proven themselves particularly helpful with regard to ambiguous problems and challenges, where there was no clear equity owner and no clear right answer – but there would clearly be detrimental consequences if the topic was left unaddressed. HSCs are critical to managing risk because they create an environment where transparency and collaboration are the standard. Due to their broad focus, HSCs can bring together a diverse group of port stakeholders. By incorporating all of the various stakeholders’ views, needs, and perspectives into their discussions, HSCs can quickly establish a more complete common understanding of an issue. Once this common ground has been established, HSCs can determine how to best manage conflicting priorities within the waterway. Often, a simple conversation to provide awareness and transparency on the different facets of an issue is enough to resolve a conflict within the confines of an HSC, where mutual respect and altruism permeates the group’s mindset and interactions.

c. Most HSCs are learning organizations and continually seek feedback to identify opportunities to improve. This NVIC captures key facets of HSC organization and operations based on a review of successful, long-standing HSCs around the nation; these are past best practices that should be considered standard elements. The enclosure,

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

Additional Concepts for Consideration – Strengthening Harbor Safety Committees, captures best practices that have been implemented at some HSCs, which should be reviewed for consideration nationwide. Each HSC will define what strategies work best to support its mission. The enclosure is meant to stimulate discussion and consideration of how to continue to improve local coordination of issues within the MTS.

d. Within the HSC, no one stakeholder group is more important than another. It is everyone's waterway to use, and that mindset encourages HSC members to remain flexible and open to adapting their views as new information is introduced. Importantly, points of view must remain dynamic or people will lose faith in the process.

e. The USCG is not responsible for ensuring there is a functioning HSC in all of the nation's ports, and the Service cannot mandate or control these organizations. The establishment and maintenance of these entities requires leadership from local port stakeholders. The USCG seeks to actively promote and encourage the establishment and expansion of these organizations, given their importance as local MTS coordinating bodies. In many of the nation's ports, the USCG could not successfully execute its responsibilities without the support of the local HSC. Because the USCG receives tremendous benefit from partnership where HSCs exist, the Service is committed to helping these entities succeed.

7. EXPECTATIONS FOR AND LIMITATIONS TO COAST GUARD SUPPORT.

a. HSCs provide an indispensable opportunity for USCG Captains of the Port (COTPs) to leverage, engage, and facilitate coordination and consultation with port stakeholders. Participation in HSCs allows the USCG to help elevate and solve unique local problems with unique local solutions. The USCG role is to share information, listen, and support the development of consensus decisions.

b. HSCs work because the USCG and other government agencies are partners in the process, not controllers of it. USCG and other federal agency partners typically serve as non-voting members on HSCs. In certain limited circumstances, the USCG may be needed to provide staffing support or temporary leadership to the HSC. Examples include organizing stakeholders to enable the establishment of a new HSC or to reinvigorate one that has ceased functioning, or providing Executive Secretariat-like support to facilitate the scheduling and running of HSC meetings. In these cases, the USCG's role is focused on ensuring the forum exists and the HSC meets and discusses pertinent issues, and not on driving agendas. When providing staffing support or temporary leadership to the HSC, the USCG must remain in a facilitator role and enable, not control, the functioning of the HSC.

c. Expectations.

(1) COTP Engagement. COTPs should understand the value of these forums and prioritize attendance at HSC meetings. Participation in HSC meetings is an

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

opportunity for the COTP to stay current on port activities, provide information on maritime issues affecting the port, receive feedback on local maritime governance issues, and communicate the USCG's commitment to partnering with the HSC.

i. Maritime governance is a collaborative process. An HSC works best when actively supported by the local COTP and their staff. Active, visible participation by the COTP and sharing of USCG information (as able) is essential to HSC meetings. Lack of USCG participation at the right levels will limit progress in discussing a variety of critical port issues, to include logistics, placement of Aids to Navigation (ATON), waterway risk management, special events, and emergency response planning.

ii. Additionally, USCG should be part of HSC discussions to avoid any misunderstanding of the Service's role, responsibilities, and capabilities as potential pathways or solutions to resolve conflict in the port are being discussed.

iii. Support of the COTP's role and engagement within the local HSC is typically the responsibility of the local USCG unit's Waterways Management Division.

(2) Information Sharing. The USCG is recognized as an authoritative source of information, which various stakeholder groups and the public need in order to advance discussions occurring at HSCs.

(3) Relationship Development. Successful partnership at the organizational level requires relationships at the individual level. A collaborative environment is one where people feel empowered to bring up issues, which depends on the strength of relationships and establishment of trust. USCG personnel understand that it is critical to nurture relationships with HSC stakeholders, and that this is a never-ending task due to the importance of these connections and turnover in key positions – both civilian and military.

(4) USCG Risk Assessment/Management Tools. Via the COTP, HSCs can have access to risk assessment and management tools that can inform local decision making. Examples of these tools include Ports and Waterways Safety Assessments, Port Access Route Studies, and Waterways Analysis and Management System studies.

d. Limitations.

(1) Leadership. As outlined in reference (e), by USCG policy the USCG cannot serve in a long-term leadership role on the HSC (i.e., cannot be the Chair or Co-Chair). This prohibition serves to protect HSCs from becoming Federal

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

Advisory Committees and therefore required to comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

(2) Enforcement. The USCG cannot serve as the enforcement arm of the HSC, and as such cannot enforce any voluntary local measures developed by the HSC. However, just like any other HSC member with authorities impacting the port, the USCG can exercise all of its existing authorities at the recommendation of, or in alignment with, HSC priorities.

(3) Pre-Decisional Information. There are limits to the information USCG can offer on ongoing investigations or regulations in the rule-making process, even to trusted partners within the confines of an HSC. In some cases, partners will be directed to submit requests under the Freedom of Information Act process to obtain desired information; this happens when the decision on whether or not the information can be released no longer rests with the local unit.

(4) Administrative Support. While many local USCG units do provide some sort of administrative support to their local HSC, this should not be perceived as a requirement. HSCs should provide for their own administration to the maximum extent possible. If support is requested by the HSC, the local COTP will have to evaluate the HSC support needs against the competing demands placed on their Waterways Management Division and determine whether administrative support can be provided by USCG staff on a temporary or routine basis. The level of USCG support may vary from one HSC to another, and may vary over time within one HSC depending on a variety of workforce issues.

(5) Voting. USCG members serve HSCs in a non-voting capacity. Many topics of interest to the HSC or its members could fall within the regulatory authority of the Coast Guard or another federal agency, which may or may not have representation present for a given HSC meeting. To ensure Coast Guard representatives do not take action at an HSC meeting that may appear to show an intent to issue new rules or policy, or provide Coast Guard views on another agency's rules or policy, USCG representatives – even if considered by the HSC to be a voting member – should avoid voting, including “seconding” motions and adopting minutes of a prior meeting.

8. GENERAL ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION. The USCG recognizes the importance of allowing each HSC to identify its geographic area of concern and adopt its own unique structure and business practices. This will result in some variation from port to port as each HSC conforms to the needs, challenges, and characteristics of its region or location. Existing or developing HSCs should not view these guidelines as mandatory requirements. The guidance contained in this document is meant to serve as an aid by identifying unifying concepts and tangible steps that can be taken to increase the effectiveness of HSCs, without impairing the local flexibility necessary for these organizations to properly address local stakeholders' needs and

issues. That said, there are several elements of general organization and operation that are recommended for adoption nationwide as standard business practices. These elements are broadly drafted here, leaving ample room for any HSC to refine them to fit their needs; enclosure (1) captures additional concepts that have been employed at select HSCs nationwide to further success and are offered for consideration.

a. Defining Success.

(1) Any HSC that works diligently, intentionally, inclusively, and cooperatively to enable improvements in the safety, efficiency, security, mobility, and environmental protection of its port or local waterway can be considered a success. At the local level, defining success should begin by identifying the goals and/or mission of the HSC.

(2) A clearly outlined mission statement can also help with recruiting new members; when it is easy to talk about who you are and what you do, it is easy to bring new stakeholders into the discussion.

b. Documented Governance. Great clarity and unity come from taking the time to produce guiding documents that outline not only the goals and mission of an HSC, but how it will behave. HSCs should have a written charter and/or bylaws³. A charter is a formal document describing the scope, aims, or principles of an organization. Bylaws are the regulations and rules that define the internal structure and guidelines of an organization, which create the framework for its governance (i.e., the inner workings and daily operations of the organization). Many existing HSCs appear to use these terms interchangeably, relying on a single document that achieves the objectives of both. The charter and/or bylaws should be referred to often and used to keep membership focused on the HSC's priorities, while also protecting the group from unintended mission expansion. These documents set clear expectations and are also critically important for knowledge transfer should a key member leave the organization. These documents should be reviewed and updated periodically, as this not only keeps them relevant, but also serves as a good reminder as to the background and purpose of the organization. Key elements of a charter and/or bylaws include:

(1) The purpose and/or mission of the organization;

(2) Geographic area of concern;

(3) Governance structure;

i. Leadership (i.e., Managing Board, Board or Directors, Executive Committee, Steering Committee, or similar) – who is eligible, how they are selected, responsibilities of individual officers, etc.

³ Examples of existing HSC charters and/or bylaws can be obtained from the Office of Waterways and Ocean Policy (CG-WWM); email CGWWM@uscg.mil to request assistance.

- ii. Term limits for leadership and members (as applicable); and
 - iii. Subcommittees;
- (4) Organizational processes; and
- (5) Membership list – by entity or stakeholder group, not individual.
- c. Organizational Structure. The structure of a committee should be designed to enable its efficient operations. While the particular elements of HSCs will differ from port to port, there are a number of organizational elements that are common across HSCs:
- (1) Full Committee. The full membership of the HSC is composed of many entities (see section 8.d below), with attendance depending on interest and other factors. Members are defined as voting or non-voting; federal, state, and local agency representatives are typically non-voting members.
 - (2) Managing Board, Board of Directors, Executive Committee, or Steering Committee. HSCs typically have a leadership team that oversees the day-to-day scheduling and operations of the HSC, and coordinates meeting agendas. This body is commonly elected from key stakeholder groups (e.g., pilots, shippers) and usually includes representatives of government agencies.
 - (3) Subcommittees. Much of the work executed within HSCs occurs in subcommittees, working groups, or task forces⁴, where a smaller number of participants can engage in lengthy and substantive discussions to develop a full understanding of issues before bringing proposed solutions to the full committee for decision. These subcommittees may be led by a selected or elected Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, and may be supported by a Secretary.
 - i. Standing Subcommittees. These are permanent subcommittees that address perennial challenges.
 - ii. Ad Hoc Subcommittees. These are temporary subcommittees established on an as-needed basis to address a short-term issue or concern.
- d. Membership. HSCs serve as a port’s primary MTS coordinating body and are uniquely created to fit the needs of each port; the make-up of each specific HSC will reflect its port region. Stakeholder inclusion is vital and all interested parties must be welcome to address the current and potential issues being considered by the HSC. HSCs should have liberal membership criteria; that is, any member of the port community with

⁴ In this section and after the introduction of the terms, the term “subcommittee” can be used interchangeably with “work group” or “task force” as applicable. There is great variation among HSCs in the use and meaning of these terms. The key points captured here apply to any sub-element of the full committee.

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

an interest in the safety, commercial viability, environmental well-being, or recreational uses of the port should be welcomed to participate. Many HSCs designate members as voting or non-voting; the number of non-voting HSC members should be limitless. An HSC is typically comprised of representatives of governmental agencies, maritime labor and industry organizations, environmental groups, and other public interest groups, to the extent they are active in a particular port, such as:

- (1) Port Authorities;
- (2) Vessel owners and operators (tankers, dry cargo, barges, ferries);
- (3) Harbor pilots or pilot associations;
- (4) Marine Exchanges;
- (5) Pilots and/or tug and tow operators;
- (6) Shipping agents;
- (7) Terminal owners/operators;
- (8) Shipyards;
- (9) Owners/operators of bridges over navigable waters;
- (10) Industry associations (national, state, and local) and/or industry segments;
- (11) Organized labor organizations;
- (12) Commercial fishing industry or associations;
- (13) Aquaculture groups;
- (14) Federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies (e.g., representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and state or local government agencies focused on coastal zone management, regional development, emergency management, transportation);
- (15) Environmental groups;
- (16) Maritime education groups (e.g., academia and non-profit groups that do marine research);
- (17) Waterfront developers;

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

- (18) Recreational boaters;
- (19) Human-powered watercraft clubs or organizations (e.g., rowing, kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding);
- (20) Yacht racing associations;
- (21) Other citizens groups; and
- (22) Members of the public (At Large).

e. Communication.

- (1) Regardless of their degree of involvement, all interested stakeholder groups should be provided meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and other important information to enable them to track the discussions of the HSC.
- (2) Active management of the membership roster and email distribution group is required to ensure timely communication. Email distribution groups and websites are low in cost and risk while high in impact in terms of keeping all stakeholders informed.

f. HSC Outputs.

- (1) Best Practices. HSCs play a critical role in the development of Voluntary Compliance Guides (e.g., Standards of Care, Best Maritime Practices, Safety Recommendations), which serve to complement existing regulations by advising mariners of unique conditions and requirements that may be encountered by vessel traffic within the local port and/or waterways, and identifying the standards and protocols (operating procedures) for ensuring greater safety in light of those unique conditions and regulatory requirements. The intent of these procedures is to provide guidance to enable stakeholders to safely share the waterway and avoid conflict. In addition, these procedures can be helpful to vessel masters entering your port for the first time, or to provide clarity to local stakeholders on how an emergency response evolution within the port should be executed.
- (2) Educational Materials. HSCs can play a critical role in educating local constituents about maritime rules and processes. For example, some HSCs develop and distribute informational brochures, produce videos, and/or use social media to bring awareness to important local safety issues.

g. Partnership with the local USCG unit. Successful HSCs maintain a strong partnership with their local USCG COTP, Chief, Waterways Management Division, and Director of Vessel Traffic Services, as applicable. HSCs can play a critical role in the familiarization

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

of newly reporting members, helping them get up to speed on challenges and opportunities within their area of responsibility as well as enabling introductions to key stakeholders.

9. EXPECTATIONS FOR EXISTING HARBOR SAFETY COMMITTEES. HSCs cannot be successful without the support of local maritime stakeholders. For those interested in strengthening their HSC, consider the following:

a. Review the section on General Organization and Operation as well as the enclosure to this NVIC, *Additional Concepts for Consideration - Strengthening Harbor Safety Committees*, and consider whether any of the identified best practices should be incorporated into or adapted for your HSC.

b. Ensure your operating procedures support a process that allows all stakeholders to effectively participate. HSC full committee meetings should be open to the public, and there should be no barrier to entry for any interested port stakeholders.

c. Hold regular meetings. It is critical meetings occur frequently enough to keep ongoing discussions moving forward, and to quickly address any new issues that arise. The most effective HSCs meet no less frequently than once per quarter and some meet bimonthly. Monthly meetings are common for large ports.

(1) The core component of any meeting is its agenda. The agenda should be available to HSC members in advance of the meeting, and should provide equal opportunity to all stakeholders to bring forward issues.

(2) Given the competing demands for time placed on these all-volunteer groups, the use of hybrid meetings, which include both an in-person and virtual connection, are encouraged to maximize stakeholder inclusion. Online meeting tools and technology are particularly beneficial to HSCs that cover a wide geographic area, where participation in person may not be feasible given large distances between stakeholders the meeting location.

d. Protect your meetings and agenda. HSCs are not a forum for self-promotion or business development. Ensure your meetings remain timely and relevant to port stakeholders by declining requests by individuals seeking to use the HSC as a forum to sell or otherwise introduce products or services to local maritime stakeholders.

e. Mentor new USCG members assigned to support your COTP.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING A NEW HARBOR SAFETY COMMITTEE. A new HSC cannot be established without the support of local maritime stakeholders. For those interested in developing an HSC, consider the following:

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

- a. Geographic scope. Identify the geographic area of concern the HSC will address. This can be simply defined, but is an important step that influences the universe of stakeholders to engage. Additionally, some COTP zones are quite large with distinct areas in need of HSC attention. In these cases, you should expect discussion on whether more than one HSC is needed to ensure relevancy for all participants, or whether one large HSC with geographically focused subcommittees would better serve local interests.
- b. Leverage your COTP's convening power. USCG support will be critical to the establishment of new HSCs. By virtue of the COTP's position and relationships, as well as the USCG's influence within the port, the COTP has the ability to bring stakeholders together to meet; that is, they have convening power. Maritime stakeholders interested in establishing an HSC will generally have to borrow the COTP's local convening power in order to bring the right group of stakeholders together to discuss the benefits and proposed way forward. Once support for the HSC is established the group will develop its own convening power, but a jump-start in the form of support from the local COTP will typically be required.
- c. Start small; expand and iterate. Identify a small coalition of interested partners who are well-respected in the local community; focus on purpose or service-minded individuals who would welcome the opportunity to have a voice and shape solutions within the maritime community. Use this small group to develop a draft charter and/or bylaws, providing a starting point to engage other stakeholders. Begin to invite more and more stakeholders to review and provide feedback on the charter and/or bylaws to shape the development of the HSC. Community buy-in is critical and cultivating it may be a time intensive process.
- d. Understand stakeholder motivations. Recruiting members will require you to communicate how each stakeholder can benefit from the HSC's creation. Some stakeholders will respond favorably and participate simply because they appreciate the opportunity to be involved in local decision-making, but for others it will be about how those decisions affect their bottom line. There are a myriad of reasons establishing an HSC can be beneficial; when recruiting stakeholders one-on-one be sure you align your pitch on "why" to the specific stakeholder you are engaging.
- e. Leverage existing HSCs. Members from many established HSCs are happy to discuss what makes their HSC successful, answer questions, or otherwise serve as mentors for people working to create new HSCs. This engagement can provide third party validation, with maritime stakeholders hearing directly from peers working in other ports about the value and return on investment they have gained from their HSC.

11. RESOURCES FOR HARBOR SAFETY COMMITTEES. A common refrain among maritime stakeholders is "if you have seen one port, you have seen one port." This sentiment is often invoked when citing unique circumstances or challenges within a port, noting that solutions developed at one HSC cannot generally be adopted wholesale by another HSC. While this is undoubtedly true, there is still much individual HSCs can learn from one another by comparing

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

their experiences. While adaptations may vary from port to port, most ports are facing the same challenges and therefore engagement to discuss problems, considerations, and other factors that go into decision-making and partnership development can be hugely beneficial.

a. National Harbor Safety Committee Conference (NHSCC). The NHSCC is a biennial conference designed to showcase best practices and lessons learned from HSCs nationwide and facilitate networking to enable year-round information sharing. An individual HSC takes on the role of host for each conference and is responsible for various logistical items (i.e., identifying the venue, arranging all on-site aspects). The hosting HSC is supported by a larger conference planning team that develops the NHSCC program (i.e., develops the agenda and format, identifies guest speakers).

b. HSC National Steering Team (NST). One output of the 2024 NHSCC was creation of the HSC NST, which serves as a guiding body that HSCs nationwide, both developing and established, can turn to for assistance⁵.

(1) The mission of the HSC NST is to provide information, guidance, and inspiration to support the establishment, development, and sustained excellence of HSCs.

(2) Like all local HSCs, the NST is a voluntary organization; it is comprised of maritime professionals with experience serving on or administering an HSC, who are willing to volunteer their time and expertise in service of the NST's mission. The HSC NST also includes representatives from key federal agencies with responsibilities in the MTS. CG-WWM, specifically the USCG HSC program manager, provides critical support as an active member of the NST and, on behalf of local USCG units, helps identify HSCs in need of the NST's support.

c. Reciprocal visits. Individual HSCs are encouraged to engage with one another directly⁶, as desired. Reciprocal visits, whereby representatives or leadership of one HSC travel to another port to engage with a different HSC to learn about their unique challenges and approaches, can be a very efficient tool to obtain new perspectives and ideas.

d. CG-WWM. The USCG HSC program manager is responsible for timely updates to policies related to HSCs. The individual serving in this position serves as a member of the HSC NST and the planning team for the NHSCC, and has a broad understanding of the operations of HSCs around the nation. The HSC program manager is available to provide guidance and assistance to local HSCs and USCG units alike.

⁵ Queries directed to the HSC NST can be routed via CG-WWM (email CGWWM@uscg.mil).

⁶ CG-WWM maintains an inventory of existing HSCs, which includes contact information for each group's leadership. HSCs can email CGWWM@uscg.mil to request assistance in finding the right point of contact, if they are interested in pursuing a reciprocal visit.

12. EXPECTATIONS FOR THE HARBOR SAFETY COMMITTEE NATIONAL STEERING TEAM.

- a. Advocate the benefits of local HSCs and promote the establishment of new HSCs in areas where they could improve local coordination of MTS issues.
- b. Provide an entry point for maritime stakeholders looking for guidance and support as they work to establish or enhance the functioning of their local HSC, as well as ongoing mentorship and advocacy to see their efforts succeed.
- c. Serve as a repository of information on HSC management and administration, to include best practices.
- d. Function as a conduit in support of local HSCs and regulatory agencies on relevant matters of broad regional or national importance.
- e. Support the National Harbor Safety Committee Conference.

13. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS. The development of this NVIC and the general policies contained within it have been thoroughly reviewed under Department of Homeland Security Directive 023-01 and Environment Planning COMDTINST 5090.1 (series) by the originating office, and are categorically excluded from further analysis under paragraph #A3 in Table 3-1 of U.S. Coast Guard Environmental Planning Implementing Procedures 5090.1. This NVIC will not have any of the following: significant cumulative impacts on the human environment; substantial controversy or substantial change to existing environmental conditions; or inconsistencies with any federal, state, or local laws or administrative determinations relating to the environment. All future specific actions resulting from the general policy in this NVIC must be individually evaluated for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Department of Homeland Security, and Coast Guard NEPA policy and compliance with all other applicable environmental mandates.

14. RECORDS MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS. This NVIC has been thoroughly reviewed during the directives clearance process, and it has been determined there are no further record scheduling requirements, in accordance with the Federal Records Act (44 U.S.C. § 3101 *et seq.*), National Archives and Records Administration requirements, and the Information and Life Cycle Management Manual, COMDTINST M5212.12 (series). This NVIC does not create significant or substantial change to existing records management requirements.

15. FORMS/REPORTS. None.

16. DISCLAIMER. This policy is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements, nor is it itself a rule. It is intended to provide guidance for USCG personnel and maritime stakeholders. It is not intended to, nor does it impose legally binding requirements on any party.

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 01-25

17. QUESTIONS. Questions regarding implementation of this NVIC should be directed to the Office of Waterways and Ocean Policy (CG-WWM) at CGWWM@uscg.mil.



W.R. Arguin

Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard

Assistant Commandant for Prevention Policy

- Encl:
- (1) Additional Concepts for Consideration – Strengthening Harbor Safety Committees
 - (2) 2024 Harbor Safety Committee National Roster

Additional Concepts for Consideration – Strengthening Harbor Safety Committees

This enclosure gathers and presents concepts identified as having contributed to the success of established Harbor Safety Committees (HSCs), many of which have been efficiently functioning for decades¹. These elements can be used by existing or developing HSCs to increase their effectiveness in coordinating local Marine Transportation System issues. While it is understood HSCs will organize and operate in the manner that best serves their locality, the U.S. Coast Guard recommends all HSCs consider each of these ideas and assess whether adoption would further the goals of their organization and/or make operations more efficient.

These concepts are presented in two categories:

- (1) *HSC Mindset*, which relates to perspective and understanding of the HSC role; and
- (2) *HSC Attributes*, which relates to how the HSC is operated.

HSC MINDSET

Relationships are central to success – Not only do successful HSCs realize the value of relationships, but their members also recognize the responsibility to foster and nurture their relationships is one that is never complete, due to the importance of these connections and the fact that people are constantly moving in and out of key positions. It is important to establish strong relationships before you need them. Individual relationships often precede and typically underpin organizational partnerships.

Leadership is a shared responsibility – The responsibility for the activities of the HSC cannot rest on the shoulders of one person. In the past, some HSCs have been led by charismatic leaders who have taken on the brunt of the work to keep the group moving forward all by themselves. But this scenario is generally not sustainable; *what happens to the HSC if something happens to that person?* Most often we have seen the result is HSC collapse, as no one is standing by ready to take over to keep things moving. Responsibility for the forward momentum of the HSC must be shared among several people. The leadership team must recognize and adapt if one member is called away for some purpose, so the organization continues on.

Attract those who embody the spirit of volunteerism – There is an altruistic thread that ties the individuals who elect to participate in their local HSC; they genuinely want to do the right thing, desire to give back to their community, and try to balance perspectives. Members care about what is happening in their waterways and are motivated by the opportunity to have a voice and play a role in shaping local decisions. Members of these group are also typically united by a keen interest in continual learning and improving their processes and practices, often going above and beyond what is required.

Acknowledge contributions – Acknowledging individual contributions reinforces a sense of unity and shared purpose. It reminds team members they are part of something bigger and their contributions are integral to the team's success. When everyone feels their collective efforts are

¹ Additional information on any of these concepts can be obtained from the Office of Waterways and Ocean Policy (CG-WWM); email CGWWM@uscg.mil to request assistance.

making a difference, it creates a positive feedback loop of motivation and improved performance.

Prioritize safety – While HSCs address a wide swath of topics, when working a challenging issue that puts relationships in tough territory and requires some prioritization of concerns many HSCs elect to prioritize safety first. This approach allows them to provide an anchor point around which to build consensus and then work through other elements (i.e., efficiency, security, mobility, and environmental protection).

Embrace self-regulation – Self-regulation is always preferred over incident-driven legislation and mandated regulations, and generally saves both time and money. In practice, this involves working to develop a consensus solution in the form of a voluntary standard or guideline all partners agree to support or mutually enforce within their own spheres of influence. Unlike regulatory actions, these voluntary local measures developed by the HSC are much easier to establish and update as new information becomes available.

HSC ATTRIBUTES

Consolidated community voices – While broad participation is an absolute priority and all voices are welcome, in some cases too many positions and voices can derail HSC meetings. For that reason, many HSCs adopt a construct where a leader is elected to represent the members of a particular sector (e.g., commercial vessels, passenger vessels, tug and barge, human powered craft, recreational fishing) who speaks on their behalf. Within this approach, the sector leader does substantive work to engage the diverse members of their constituency to discuss and debate issues before the full HSC meets, with the end result being identification of that sector’s unified, consensus position. This pre-work ensures each sector arrives at the HSC’s full committee discussion with a clear position, which the sector leader advocates for, and thus streamlines discussion at the full HSC level. In some cases, HSCs have formalized this approach within their organizational structure, with most membership votes allocated by sector.

Process governs discussions – Some HSCs use Robert’s Rules of Order, a manual of parliamentary procedure, to govern how they conduct meetings to provide for the orderly consideration of all views. Having a process in place can be particularly useful when controversial issues arise and it becomes important to redirect participants without creating offense. Setting time limits for individuals during open discussion may be beneficial to avoid derailing the meeting.

Track action items publicly – HSCs can create frameworks that support accountability by tracking progress of action items, measuring goals, and fostering a sense of responsibility. This should be done with a focus on transparency. Transparency in this context is about making sure all stakeholders have access to relevant information about the HSC’s operations, decisions, and performance. A lack of transparency can cause distrust and resentment among team members.

Engage with other HSCs – When new challenges face their local port, successful HSCs ask themselves “who else has dealt with this issue,” and engage HSCs that have faced those or similar challenges to learn from their experience. While every port is different, and therefore

strategies will need to be adapted to local conditions, this engagement provides a critical learning opportunity and provides the best opportunity for success. Ideally HSCs not only document their best practices, but they also seek to share them with other HSCs around the nation. The HSC National Steering Team plays a critical role in facilitating engagement among HSCs and the sharing of best practices.

Resource to succeed – For many HSCs, the only resource required for success is the time and expertise of its individual members. A dedicated meeting venue is also a valuable resource, though some HSCs have a preference for rotating meeting locations among participants and many note the valuable benefits of remote or hybrid meetings. That said, HSCs with dedicated funding support observe additional tangible benefits in terms of staffing support, liability protection, and social networking. With the exception of the California HSCs (which were mandated by state law and are financially supported by the state), most HSCs must solicit voluntary dues or other donations of funding to support operations.

- Staffing support can be critical to providing for administration of the HSC, and could include scheduling and hosting meetings (i.e., confirming a meeting space, establishing a virtual connection for hybrid meetings), agenda development (i.e., soliciting input, finalizing agenda with HSC leadership, confirming speaker availability), taking and publishing meeting minutes, management of the membership list and email distribution list, transmitting email on behalf of HSC leadership (i.e., disseminating agenda and other details in advance of meetings), development and maintenance of the HSC's website, and preparing hard copy materials for the meeting.
- Some HSCs maintain insurance to provide liability protection, which enables them to provide direction and encourage actions within their area of responsibility without worrying about whether they will face a lawsuit.
- There is a social aspect to any HSC meeting, with members connecting on the margins for various discussions, both personal and professional. Some HSCs capitalize on this by hosting networking events after their routine meetings or hosting coffee and donuts during breaks. While not required, these events ensure members linger and enable the deepening of relationships. In some cases, provisioning is a responsibility circulated among various members. In others, a dedicated funding source enables the HSC to serve refreshments during the networking events.

2024 Harbor Safety Committee National Roster

Captain of the Port Zone	Harbor Safety Committee (s)
Sector Boston (33 CFR §3.05-10)	Mass Bay Harbor Safety Committee
Sector Northern New England (33CFR §3.05-15)	Maine & New Hampshire Port Security Forum
Sector Southeastern New England (33 CFR §3.05-20)	N/A (in development)
Sector New York (33 CFR §3.05-30)	Harbor Safety, Navigation, and Operations Committee of the Port of NY/NJ
	Hudson River Safety, Navigation, and Operations Committee
Sector Long Island Sound (33 CFR §3.05-35)	N/A
Sector Delaware Bay (33 CFR §3.25-05)	Mariners Advisory Committee for the Bay and River Delaware
Sector Virginia (33 CFR §3.25-10)	Virginia Harbor Safety Committee
Sector Maryland-National Capital Region (33 CFR §3.25-15)	Port of Baltimore Harbor Safety Committee
	Delmarva Waterway Transport Committee
Sector North Carolina (33 CFR §3.25-20)	N/A (in development)
Sector Miami (33 CFR§3.35.10)	Miami Harbor Safety Committee
	Port Everglades Harbor Safety Committee
Sector Charleston (33 CFR §3.35-15)	Charleston Area Harbor Safety Committee
MSU Savannah (33 CFR §3.35-15)	N/A (in development)
Sector Jacksonville (33 CFR §3.35-20)	Northeast Florida Harbor Safety Committee
	Port Canaveral Harbor Safety Committee
Sector San Juan (33 CFR §3.35-25)	Puerto Rico South Coast Harbor Safety and Security Committee
	North Coast Harbor Safety Committee
Sector St. Petersburg (33 CFR §3.35-35)	Tampa Bay Harbor Safety and Security Committee
Sector Key West (33 CFR §3.35-40)	Key West Harbor Safety and Security Committee
Sector Mobile (33 CFR §3.40-10)	N/A
Sector New Orleans (33 CFR §3.40-15)	Greater New Orleans Port Safety Council Harbor Safety Committee
MSU Houma (33 CFR §3.40-15)	N/A
Sector Houston-Galveston (33 CFR §3.40-28)	Lone Star Harbor Safety Committee
MSU Port Arthur (33 CFR §3.40-28)	Calcasieu River Waterway Harbor Safety Committee ¹
	Southeast Texas Waterways Advisory Council
Sector Corpus Christi (33 CFR §3.40-35)	South Texas Waterways Advisory Committee
Sector Upper Mississippi River (33 CFR §3.40-40)	N/A

¹ Engages USCG Marine Safety Unit Lake Charles

Captain of the Port Zone	Harbor Safety Committee (s)
Sector Lower Mississippi (33 CFR §3.40-60)	Lower Mississippi River Committee
	Arkansas Oklahoma Port Operators Association
	Red River Valley Association
Sector Ohio Valley (33 CFR §3.40-65)	Huntington District Waterways Association ²
MSU Pittsburgh (33 CFR §3.40-65)	Waterways Association of Pittsburgh
Sector Eastern Great Lakes (33 CFR §3.45-10)	Cuyahoga River Task Force ³
Sector Lake Michigan (33 CFR §3.45-15)	Milwaukee Harbor Safety Committee
	Chicago Harbor Safety Committee ⁴
Sector Detroit (33 CFR §3.45-20)	Detroit St. Clair River Working Group
	Western Lake Erie Harbor Safety Committee ⁵
Sector Northern Great Lakes (33 CFR §3.45-45)	Straits of Mackinac Harbor Safety Committee
MSU Duluth (33 CFR §3.45-45)	Harbor Technical Advisory Committee
Sector Los Angeles/Long Beach (33 CFR §3.55-10)	Los Angeles/Long Beach Harbor Safety Committee
	Port of Hueneme Harbor Safety Committee
Sector San Diego (33 CFR §3.55-15)	San Diego Harbor Safety Committee
	Lower Colorado River Safe Waterways Committee
Sector San Francisco (33 CFR §3.55-20)	Harbor Safety Committee of the San Francisco Region
	Harbor Safety Committee of the Humboldt Bay Area
Sector Puget Sound (33 CFR §3.65-10)	Puget Sound Harbor Safety Committee
Sector Columbia River (33 CFR §3.65-15)	Grays Harbor Safety Committee
	Lower Columbia Region Harbor Safety Committee
	Coos Bay Harbor Safety Committee
Sector Honolulu (33 CFR §3.70-10)	Hawaii Ocean Safety Team
Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam (33 CFR §3.70-15)	Port User Group
Sector Southeast Alaska (33 CFR §3.85-10)	Alaska Association of Harbormasters and Port Administrators
Sector Western Alaska and U.S. Arctic (33 CFR §3.85-15)	Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee
	Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee
MSU Valdez (Prince William Sound; 33 CFR §3.85-15)	Valdez Marine Safety Committee

² Engages USCG Marine Safety Unit Huntington

³ Engages USCG Marine Safety Unit Cleveland

⁴ Engages USCG Marine Safety Unit Chicago

⁵ Engages USCG Marine Safety Unit Toledo