

Charleston Area Harbor Safety Committee (HSC) Meeting Minutes

Thursday – October 23, 2025

Roll Call & Call to Orders: LTJG Nick Jones, USCG

Meeting was conducted via Zoom and in-person at 200 Ports Authority Drive, Mount Pleasant. LTJG Jones completed a roll call and transitioned to opening remarks.

Opening Comments:

Opening Remarks: Ms. Karen McDonald, Moran Towing, provided a welcome and brief opening remarks.

Committee Administration: N/A

New Business: N/A

Open Issues, Presentations, Proposals, Follow-Up:

- **Newport News Shipbuilding** – Mark Schmitt
 - Presented an update on operations at the Upper Cooper River site. He explained that Newport News Shipbuilding, part of Huntington Ingalls, is expanding operations in the Charleston area, with plans to grow to 1,200 employees in the next two years. The company builds submarine modules and aircraft carriers, with the Charleston site focusing on building components for submarines. Mr. Schmitt discussed the significant increase in defense-related work in South Carolina, including the construction of modules for the Virginia-class and Columbia-class submarines. He also addressed concerns about increased ship traffic in the Upper Cooper River, explaining that barge sizes and traffic patterns would remain similar to previous operations, with one shipment per month targeted for 2027.
- **Wounded Nature/Working Veterans** – Rudy Socha
 - Mr. Socha provided an update on derelict vessel removal operations, noting significant success on the vessel backlog through Charleston Harbor area, Georgetown, and Horry County. Mr. Socha advised of an operation on November 10th in partnership with SCDNR, Charleston PD Harbor Patrol, & TowBoat US to remove 10 derelict vessels.
- **Moran Towing** – Karen McDonald
 - Ms. McDonald discussed the relocation of Buoy 49 and the increasing recreational vessel traffic in the harbor. For Buoy 49, the group discussed moving it to a new location to better utilize the turning basin, with CWO Ben Reilly explaining the process would involve a 60-day public comment period. The group also reviewed a draft letter addressing concerns about recreational vessel traffic, highlighting its impact on commercial operations and economic activity in the port. Ms. McDonald noted that she would submit the official relocation of Buoy 49 to Sector Charleston Waterways Management. In addition, the draft letter on recreational vessel traffic

was to be sent to the HSC distribution group for comment, with a deadline for comments of 30Oct25.

- **Charleston Pilots – John Cameron**
 - Discussed the issue of vessels intentionally removing navigational safety equipment, such as masts and radar, to fit under bridges. They explored the regulatory requirements and potential solutions, including creating a standard operating procedure and an MSIB (Maritime Safety Information Bulletin) to address this issue. The team agreed to collaborate on developing criteria for when such equipment removal is allowed and to socialize these ideas within the group before finalizing them. Will provide initial proposal of way forward to USCG.
 - Discussed concerns about GPS hacking and the importance of having paper charts as a backup. Steve Kicklighter emphasized the need for an SOP for navigating without GPS, while others debated the extent of reliance on electronics. The group agreed to address this issue in an upcoming AMSC exercise. Additionally, they discussed the need for more comprehensive harbor surveys beyond the federal channel, with John suggesting a recommendation to NOAA.

Announcements/General Comments: Ports and Waterways Safety Assessment postponed until 2026.

Closing:

LTJG Jones thanked everyone for attending and concluded the meeting. The next HSC meeting is tentatively scheduled for January 23rd, 2026.