

Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council

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Summary of Tuesday, May 28, 2013 Meeting

US Coast Guard on Houston Ship Channel Security

LTJG Tom Matthews of the US Coast Guard talked about the kind of threats for which the Coast Guard prepares and the measures they have in place to help prevent and respond to a terrorist attack on the Houston Ship Channel. Matthews was asked about security risks from the Panama Canal expansion.

Anti-terrorism enforcement protection is just one of the Coast Guard's responsibilities. To that end, they enforce the Maritime Security Act (MARSEC), take part in drills, gather intelligence, patrol the Houston Ship Channel, and participate in anti-terrorism initiatives and task forces with agencies, industry, local law enforcement, others. The Coast Guard has jurisdiction in any navigable waterway with access to open seas as well as any inland water body that falls into two states, like Lake Texoma.

Houston is the economic lifeline of the US even before the expansion of the Panama Canal allows larger ships to cross from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean and more easily reach the Gulf of Mexico. While the exact impact on local ports is not known, expansion is expected to increase ship traffic, so there is likely to be a need for more Coast Guard patrols and personnel. Houston is *not* one of the US ports that is gearing up to handle the largest ships that will be able to pass through the new locks. It is possible these bigger ships could anchor offshore to transfer cargo to smaller vessels that will fit in the Houston Ship Channel.

After 9-11, the ship channel was closed to small boats west of the Battleship Texas. Signs are posted to make that clear to boaters, and even those who innocently enter the security zone are cited. Matthews reminded members that the average person can help protect community and industry against terrorism by watching for suspicious behavior and reporting it to local law enforcement.