

Tour of U.S. Coast Guard Sector Houston-Galveston

Facilitator Emily Morris welcomed the sizable PCAC group and made some quick announcements before introducing U.S. Coast Guard Cdr. Kelley Brown, Prevention Department Chief. Morris noted that there would not be Plant Updates or Small-Group Discussion during the meeting to allow more time for the tour.

Brown welcomed the group and explained that U.S. Coast Guard Sector Houston-Galveston is a key operational unit of the U.S. Coast Guard, responsible for safety, security, and stewardship of the Marine Transportation System in the Gulf Coast region, from the Colorado River in southwest Texas to 60 miles east of Lake Charles, LA, extending 200 miles offshore to the U.S. exclusive economic zone. Brown said Sector Houston-Galveston's mission includes search and rescue, law enforcement, environmental protection, and disaster response, safeguarding major ports such as Houston, Beaumont, Lake Charles, Texas City, Port Arthur, Freeport, and Galveston. She reminded the group that the Houston Ship Channel is one of the nation's most economically vital port regions.

Brown said that Sector Houston-Galveston personnel respond to an average of three major incidents annually. Major incidents include facility or vessel fires, hurricanes, vessel collisions, and security incidents, among other events. Brown provided a handout that lists additional details.

With about 40 attendees, the PCAC was divided into three groups, which took turns touring the Vessel Traffic Services room. While one group took the tour, the other groups stayed in the Mess Hall with U.S.C.G. staff and asked questions about the facility and the role the U.S.C.G. plays in the Houston Ship Channel. Additional information learned during the tour follows:

- U.S.C.G. is the only uniformed service designed to keep commerce flowing – Houston area contributes >\$1 trillion to the U.S. economy
- Sector Houston-Galveston operates multiple stations and units:
 - Search and Rescue Stations: Freeport, Galveston, Houston, Lake Charles, Sabine Pass
 - Marine Safety Units: Lake Charles, Port Arthur, Texas City
 - Aids to Navigation Teams: Galveston, Sabine Pass
 - Vessel Traffic Services (VTS): Houston-Galveston and Port Arthur offices
- Vessel Traffic Services:
 - Facilitates vessel traffic safely and efficiently – to keep commerce flowing
 - Constantly communicating with boat traffic
 - Coast Guard personnel monitors vessel movements, receives sailing-plan/check-in information, provides advisories, and manages vessel traffic in the waterway, coordinating vessel movements when they enter, move within, or leave the VTS area.
 - Help to ensure that vessels requiring local pilots are prepared for safe transit before entering the Houston Ship Channel.
 - All personnel in VTS are active duty or veterans, including those now working as civilians
 - Education requirements for VTS is a high school diploma, U.S.C.G. boot camp, and on the job training.
 - Houston-Galveston VTS is the most demanding post with more vessel traffic than other posts around the country.
- Ships are responsible for the wake they cause; a large wake can pull a ship off lines and create a spill
- PCAC member facilities will contact Sector Houston-Galveston to respond to a spill
 - U.S.C.G. will investigate to determine who the responsible party is and next steps

U.S.C.G. members who participated with escorting and conducting the tour:

- Alberto Hernandez – Lieutenant Commander, Navy (Retired); Vessel Traffic Service Director
- LTJG Ammarie Wallet – Vessel Traffic Service
- Commander Kelley Brown – Prevention Department Chief
- Lieutenant Commander Orlando Hernandez – Waterways Division Chief
- Ensign Bryan Crane – Waterways Management
- Marine Science Technician First Class (MST1) Meghan Kaufmann – Port State Control Inspections
- Marine Science Technician First Class (MST1) Crystina Cruz – Waterways Management
- Marine Science Technician Third Class (MST3) Hunter Yates – Facility Inspections