



REPRINT: Encountering Naval Protection Zones

The following article, taken from the 14-Aug-02 issue of the Wall Street Journal is entitled "Pull Over, Sailor – Pleasure Boaters Find New Rules Bring Searches and Stress; Navigating 'Security Zones'". Written by Elizabeth Bernstein, the article provides material that you may be able to use to enlighten your recreational boating safety students as to the seriousness of enforcement practices nationwide.

Pull Over Sailor

Wall Street Journal

August 14, 2002 - Zipping through Boston Harbor in his 29-foot Sea Ray on a recent afternoon, Mike Kenealy suddenly found himself in hot water. Out of nowhere, a Coast Guard helicopter swooped overhead, and a police boat -- its blue lights flashing and sirens screaming -- barreled down on him at full speed. Then there was the boat with machine guns waiting up the river.

His crime? He had unwittingly gone afoul of a new security zone set up to protect a natural-gas tanker from terrorists. "I was scared to death," says the 56-year-old real estate agent,

This summer, boaters around the country are getting caught in a wave of new rules governing nautical behavior after the terrorist attacks last September. The Coast Guard, aided by state authorities and local marine police, has created approximately 100 new floating security zones from the Chesapeake Bay to Puget Sound. Boats are now barred from the water surrounding military ships, nuclear power plants and some monuments. The result: Random boardings of pleasure boats have jumped by 15%, and in many harbors, police are even asking boaters to spy on each other.

It doesn't help that traffic on the nation's waterways is the highest in recent memory, up as much as 30% in many harbors this year alone. A boat boom in the 1990s has left local piers and garages saturated with pleasure craft, and a weak economy has forced more families to forgo expensive trips and stay moored closer to home. "It's not Macy's at Thanksgiving, but it's plenty hectic," says Jim Bailey, who has seen a 25% jump in his business this summer at the three marinas he co-owns near Morehead City, N.C.

Boating isn't supposed to be this way, of course. Until recently, the biggest worries for weekend sailors were ice and suntan oil. But now, while most boaters can still have a carefree summer, they will have to worry about dropping anchor near, say, a water filtration plant. In one recent incident, a boater was detained by the Coast Guard after he refused to

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budge from a spot near a U.S. Navy ship in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He faces charges and a potential \$250,000 fine.

"We have to make sure people know this is serious business," says Vice Adm. Jim Hull, commander of the Coast Guard's Atlantic Area.

For the most part, boaters aren't opposed to the new scrutiny, with terrorism weighing heavily on people's minds. But even so, it's causing ripples in the lifelong habits of the nation's boaters, many of whom bought a boat to leave such frustrations behind. In the Northeast, lobster fishermen have had their traps searched for bombs. Elsewhere, small-craft owners drive hours out of their way because favorite launches near high security areas are closed.

Even favorite fishing holes are now banned, including one of Ken Carson's lucky spots on New York's East River, where schools of stripers linger offshore of the United Nations headquarters. The area has been declared off-limits, and Mr. Carson, who learned of the ban from his marina, has had to search for new hotspots. "When they put a machine gun in your face, what can you do?" the Weehawken, N.J., charter captain says.

In the past, boaters could cruise almost anywhere. Most areas designated off-limits were sanctuaries set aside for endangered marine life, such as birds, sea turtles and certain aquatic plants. In Florida, for example, the state created "no wake zones" to protect manatees from boaters' propellers.

Those were the good ol' days. Now, the crackdowns aren't just happening at obvious terrorist targets such as waters near New York and Washington, but at selected rivers, lakes, bays and along the nation's coastline. From the industrial port of Seattle to the naval town of Norfolk, Va., many of the new security zones require boaters to keep at least 100 yards away from water-filtration tanks, cruise ships and other sensitive areas whenever possible.

The Chicago-area shoreline on Lake Michigan has several high-risk areas, including a nuclear power plant, a naval base and a number of beaches. Little wonder, then, that during Mike Marinko's first three outings on his new 26-foot powerboat this summer, he was stopped by the authorities each time, and boarded twice. His offense: an Alabama sticker that raised suspicion in waters 800 miles north. He now plans to do his boating on a smaller, more remote lake in Wisconsin, where there are fewer patrols. "I thought it was going to be great having Lake Michigan so close, but now you're getting harassed all the time," he says.

Extending the long arm of the law, authorities are even enlisting civilians in undercover surveillance. Many cities around the country, from Newport, R.I., to New Orleans, have adopted the Coast Guard's Coast Watch program, which asks boaters to look out for seemingly shifty activity like loitering under bridges, photographing commercial ships or trying to buy boats with cash. Some local Coast Guard stations have passed out "suspicious activity worksheets," which prompt boaters to list a suspect boat's registration number and the operator's ethnicity.

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"Boating is like anything else now," says Eunice Lyle, an amateur racing sailor on Lake Michigan. "Normally, we concentrate on racing tactics; now we have to look for anything suspicious."

Some say it's about time -- and not because they're worried about terrorists. Authorities have labored for years to get boaters to take boat safety as seriously as they would driving a car. Many boaters don't have the foggiest idea about right-of-way rules, much less what a security zone is. While the number of boating fatalities is down, about 80% of the operators involved in accidents have never taken a boating-safety course. "People prepare themselves well for having a good time on the water, but not for protecting their own lives," says Col. Richard A. Murray, director of the Massachusetts Environmental Police, which patrols the state's waters. This summer, his agency has issued 15% more tickets, for everything from outdated flares to boating while intoxicated.

At the Boat Owners Association of the United States, Michael Sciulla, vice president of government and public affairs, says he hasn't heard of any negative reaction from boaters. "The total number of boardings is minuscule in comparison to the thousands of boaters on the water."

A Coast Guard spokesman declined to give figures on the number of boardings. Nevertheless, Congress has awarded the Coast Guard an emergency 13% increase in addition to its fiscal 2002 budget of \$5.7 billion, to help pay for more patrol boats and additional personnel to step up inspections and to study the vulnerability of certain ports.

Tim Ruecker, a money manager and owner of the Kookaburra, a 45-foot motor yacht, doesn't mind. While whale watching with his wife and friends off San Diego recently -- within a mile of two naval bases -- a voice from a bullhorn commanded him to stop. After boarding, two gun-toting officers checked the passengers' IDs and searched the boat. Satisfied, they gave Mr. Ruecker a card with a phone number and asked him to report any suspicious activity. Afterward, "part of me felt warm and fuzzy," he says.

Just Checking

Across the country, the Coast Guard and other law-enforcement agencies have set up new security zones around water-filtration tanks, power plants, Navy ships and other high-risk areas. Here is a sampling.

- City: Chicago Off-Limits Area: Jardine Water Purification Plant Comments: Authorities restricted access to the entire Navy Pier tourist area (next to this facility), but eased the rules, due partly to complaints from some of the area's 94,000 boaters.
- City: Boston Off-Limits Area: KeySpan gas tanks Comments: Boaters must find somewhere else to put their boats in the water; a public-access ramp near this landmark in nearby Dorchester has been closed.

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- City: Miami Off-Limits Area: Cruise ships in the Port of Miami Comments: Waving goodbye to ship passengers may be a tradition, but in Miami you'll have to do it from shore; pleasure craft must keep 100 yards away.
- City: New York Off-Limits Area: Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island Comments: While New York City's 27,000 boaters face fewer restrictions than they did last fall, getting too close to Lady Liberty is still a no-no -- boats must stay 150 yards away.
- City: San Diego Off-Limits Area: San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station Comments: The fish that like to pool in the warm waters released by this power plant are safer now -- at least from the fishermen, who must stay at least one nautical mile away.
- City: San Francisco Off-Limits Area: San Francisco and Oakland airports Comments: After anglers complained to Washington that the 2,000-yard security zones around the airports hurt their fishing, the Coast Guard reduced them to 200 feet.

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