Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee
Meeting Summary
April 23, 2026
1:00pm – 4:00pm (AKDT)

Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly Chambers (144 N. Binkley St, Soldotna, AK 99669)

Managing Board:
Mayor Peter Micciche, President
Mike Munger, Secretary/Treasurer
Captain Paul Mehler, *HSC Chair*

Committee Members:
Captain Justin Theriot, At Large – Alternate
Steve "Vinnie" Catalano, CIRCAC – Primary
Shaylon Cochran, CIRCAC – Alternate
David Martin, Commercial Fishing – Primary
Frank Smith, Dry Cargo Ship Operators – Primary
Vicente "Ben" Cruz, Dry Cargo Ship Operators - Alternate
Suzann Speckman, Environmental – Alternate
Captain Brad Kroon, Harbor Tug Operators – Primary
Bill Wolverton, Offshore Oil Production – Primary
David Griffin, Port MacKenzie – Primary
Ronnie Poole, Port of Alaska – Alternate
Bryan Hawkins, Port of Homer – Primary
Todd Paxton, Response Organization – Primary
Todd Duke, Salvage Organization – Primary
Luke Hasenbank, Ship Agents – Primary
Captain Mark Maxim, Tanker Operators – Primary
Carolyn Crawford, Navigation Work Group Chair

Ex Officio:
Carly Lynch, USACE
Captain Christopher Culpepper, USCG (COTP)
LT Brett Woodward, USCG
CIV Daniel Payne, USCG
Colonel Adam Shockley, DOD ALCOM
Jordan Boghosian, AK Marine Exchange
Jade Gamble, ADEC
David Blossom, ADEC
Chief John Harris, Nikiski Fire Department

Other:
Jim Butler, Alaska Chadux Network
Matt Odum, Alaska Chadux Network
Colonel Ben Simon, DOD ALCOM
Chris Graff, Gallagher Marine Systems
Kendra Bulawa, Global Diving & Salvage
Sir Kerry McClelland, K.s.M Foundation
Mason Reed, Matson
Chris Svencer, Resolve Marine
Gina Winters, USCG Port Security
Noel Jones, USCG HQ
Haley Griffin, Nuka Research
Sara Werba, Nuka Research

Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Captain Paul Mehler, HSC Chair, reviewed the agenda and called the sixteenth meeting of the Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee (CIHSC) to order at 1:01 pm AKDT. Captain Mehler led the Pledge of Allegiance and reviewed general housekeeping items. Haley Griffin led introductions for meeting attendees.

Approval of Agenda

Motion Bryan Hawkins, Vinnie Catalano to approve the agenda as prepared. Motion passes by no objection.

Meeting Summary October 16, 2025

Motion Bryan Hawkins, Captain Justin Theriot to approve the October 16, 2025, meeting summary as prepared. Motion passes by no objection.

Ex-Officio Reports

United States Army Corp of Engineers (USACE)

Carly Lynch reported that dredging began on April 9 at the Port of Alaska. Four additional dredging projects will begin soon in Dillingham, Ninilchik, Homer, and Nome. A contractor is mobilizing to St. Paul Island for breakwater repair and harbor dredging. The budget for 2028 is currently being developed for new and ongoing projects. The President's Budget for FY27 was released on 3-Apr-2026 and can be viewed at https://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Budget/. The FY27 Budget reflects

USACE capabilities and priorities for executing the Civil Works program. The current budget prioritizes limited resources towards core mission areas, with a strong emphasis on completing ongoing projects.

United States Coast Guard (USCG)
LT Woodward highlighted the recent ice season in the Cook Inlet and use of the Cook Inlet Ice Guidelines. He noted the importance of incorporating lessons learned into future revisions of the Guidelines to keep them relevant. LNG operations are expected to resume within the next month, with Cook Inlet likely becoming an LNG importer in the near term. This will increase traffic around the Kenai LNG facility. LT Woodward also emphasized the importance of cybersecurity training and continued vigilance in maritime security.

Department of Defense (DOD) ALCOM
Col. Adam Shockley reported ongoing maritime operations across Alaska, including collaboration with U.S. and Canadian USCG partners. Increased air and maritime activity is anticipated around Adak Island as the Department of War considers potential investments. He noted coordination with David Griffin at Port MacKenzie and the USCG for the next Arctic Edge exercise, scheduled for Whittier in spring 2027.

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC)
Jade Gamble reported that DEC has funded a home heating oil tank assistance program to support homeowners affected by heating oil spills. During summer 2025, approximately 20 tanker inspections were conducted in Cook Inlet. There were 694 reported spills statewide in 2025, with 461 occurring in Cook Inlet. Of those, 19, were vessel-related, totaling approximately 750 gallons of oil. There are currently 21 contingency plans in the renewal process. An exercise simulating a blowout at a BlueCrest facility was conducted in March, and a Kenai Pipeline Company exercise is scheduled for August.

In early April, a lithium battery fire occurred at an EV charging station in Cooper Landing. DEC responded in coordination with hazmat teams, the EPA, and local fire departments (Anchorage, Moose Pass, and Seward). Response actions included plume and air monitoring and evacuation support.

Marine Exchange of Alaska (MXAK)
Jordan Boghosian highlighted implementation of the MXAK Blue View Program, which includes direction-finding capabilities for mariners as the boating season begins. A key goal of the program is to incorporate real-time information on ice conditions and boundaries, allowing mariners to access the most current data available. MXAK has deployed its first direction-finding radio in Nikiski, validating vessel position reporting and destination data over the past six months. MXAK's AIS capabilities have also recently supported USCG operations, including timely responses to several Mayday calls.

Managing Board Report
Mayor Micciche highlighted the need to fill primary seat vacancies on the committee, including Cruise Ship Operators, Tug & Barge Operators, and Small Passenger Vessel Operators. Consideration may be given to a future seat for LNG Carriers, given the increase in LNG-related activity in Cook Inlet. The CIHSC is fully funded for 2026. Mayor Micciche thanked members for their contributions. He also reported that Captain Ron Ward has retired as Vice President, and Captain Jeff Brue has assumed the role. Appreciation was expressed for Captain Ward's service to the CIHSC since its formation.

HSC Chair Report
Captain Mehler described the winter operations as particularly challenging and requested feedback on the Ice Guidelines. The Guidelines were active from December 27, 2025, through April 9, 2026. Condition Bravo was in effect from January 9–18 and again from February 19–March 25. Condition Alpha in Lower Cook Inlet indicates the presence of ice for all operations, while Condition Bravo, the highest alert level, is implemented when ice threatens safe vessel mooring. Ice conditions were severe, including complete ice coverage across the Inlet at Nikiski.

Operations were difficult, and some smaller vessels encountered challenges navigating ice. However, the maritime community collaborated effectively to maintain safe operations. The Alaska Response Corporation refined its sea ice overflight patterns, generating reports shared with the committee and public. CIRCAC also maintained its sea ice cameras throughout the winter, providing valuable monitoring during significant ice conditions. A hotwash will be conducted to gather feedback and

lessons learned on the Guidelines, then shared with the CIHSC. Captain Mehler emphasized priorities for the Committee, including recruiting new members, incorporating member presentations into meetings, and increasing community engagement. He encouraged members to share training opportunities.

Workgroup Reports

Navigation Work Group
Carolyn Crawford reported on a recent Navigation Work Group meeting, which was well attended. The group will meet on a quarterly basis. A key focus of the meeting was on pilotage and anchoring requirements in Cook Inlet. Discussion centered on vessel loitering, particularly for those required to carry a pilot in state waters, including whether such vessels should be required to keep a pilot onboard when loitering, and what duration of loitering is acceptable. The group will analyze available data from the Marine Exchange on the frequency of state-piloted vessels loitering. They will also assess how loitering activity may impact traffic patterns in Cook Inlet. Captain Mehler noted that confusion arose around vessels transiting into Kachemak Bay and not having a pilot onboard.

In addition, the Work Group discussed vessel entries into Cook Inlet, noting that requirements may vary depending on the vessel 's coverage (e.g., ARC, 1-Call, or others), with primary relevance to tanker operations. This group will also revisit and evaluate the 20-year-old *Cook Inlet Potential Places of Refuge (PPOR)* report published by ADEC, with the goal of updating recommendations as appropriate.

Harbor Safety Plan (HSP) Work Group
Vinnie Catalano reported that the HSP Work Group will be meeting twice in 2026 to review and update the HSP. The first meeting will focus on reviewing the current plan and re-familiarizing members with its contents, while the second will incorporate updates from the CIHSC along with feedback from the public to prepare a revised draft for Committee review. The approved plan will be circulated to the public and the Committee to ensure broad stakeholder engagement. Haley Griffin will coordinate with Vinnie to schedule a Work Group meeting.

Salvage and Marine Firefighting (MFF) Work Group
Todd Duke reported that the Salvage and MFF Work Group's progress has been impacted by the government shutdown. Work on the MFF Plan is ongoing with Dan Payne, though some elements are also delayed pending guidance from headquarters. Despite these challenges, the group recently held a productive meeting with regional Search and Rescue (SAR) and salvage partners, exchanging ideas and focusing on improving response capabilities, particularly for smaller passenger vessel incidents. While no major salvage cases occurred in Cook Inlet this winter, there was notable activity involving tug and barge and fishing vessels in the Aleutians, Canada, and the Pacific Northwest.

On the training front, Resolve has submitted a marine firefighting training proposal for Cook Inlet fire departments, with funding opportunities currently being explored. CIRCAC is working with Todd Duke to revive a regional MFF symposium or training program to better support the maritime community. Dan Payne noted that the MFF Plan is nearing completion and is pending final approval from the Work Group and signature from the Captain of the Port. The Salvage Plan has already been signed. A Work Group meeting will be scheduled to continue advancing these efforts.

Facilitator's Report
Haley Griffin thanked the participants for attending the meeting and stated that recruiting continues to fill vacant primary seats. She will share details for the fall meeting in Anchorage as they are confirmed.

Presentation – Abandoned and Derelict Vessels (ADVs) in Alaska
Jim Butler provided an overview of ADVs in Alaska, noting that increasing numbers of aging vessels are creating growing risks to navigation, public safety, and the environment. He outlined the legal framework under Alaska statutes, including definitions, reporting, and removal requirements. A major challenge is limited and declining funding, with reduced or eliminated state support and federal funding available only under specific conditions (e.g., pollution or obstruction), making removal costly and difficult. The process for addressing ADVs involves strict notice and reclamation timelines followed by disposal, but enforcement is often constrained. Case examples demonstrated the complexity and expense of removal, particularly when ownership is unclear or hazards are minimal. Overall, ADVs were identified as a growing issue requiring coordinated agency action and prioritization of risks.

Following the presentation, Dave Blossom asked whether a fleet buy-back program has been considered. Bryan Hawkins noted that, if pursued, responsibility for the vessel's future should remain with the individual, not the State.

Presentation – Matson Operations Briefing
Ben Cruz spoke to Matson's leadership and operations, with an emphasis on performance priorities for 2026 and maintaining reliability in a highly seasonal and complex operating environment. Alaska remains a core Jones Act lifeline market where schedule reliability and on-time cargo availability are prioritized, supporting essential consumer supply chains and export sectors. Matson provides twice-weekly service to Anchorage and Kodiak and weekly service to Dutch Harbor, with all services originating from Tacoma, Washington.

Operationally, Anchorage serves as the primary gateway and highest-throughput terminal but faces increased complexity from mixed cargo and congestion risks, further impacted by the start of the Port of Alaska Modernization Program in 2026. Kodiak and Dutch Harbor operate as critical, seasonal seafood hubs with limited capacity and weather sensitivity, requiring extensive planning and operational coordination. Across terminals, key 2026 priorities include safety, proactive equipment planning (reefers, chassis, empties), disciplined gate operations, clear communication, and consistent execution of deliveries under variable conditions.

New Business
Kris Holderied will present on Cook Inlet ocean model products, including the Cook Inlet Ocean Particle Trajectory Tool at the fall meeting.

Public/Final Comments
David Martin asked to share a reminder of the upcoming drift fishing season on the CIHSC website. Channels 10, 13, and 16 are typically monitored. LT Woodward added that the USCG is preparing their next Ports and Waterways Safety Assessment (PAWSA) in April 2027. He stated that he would be willing to present this to the Committee at the fall meeting.

Review Action Items & Set Next Meeting
Captain Mehler and Ms. Griffin outlined the action items.

- ❖ CIHSC Members will share membership and presentation ideas, and training opportunities.
- ❖ CIHSC Members will provide feedback on the Cook Inlet Ice Guidelines.
- ❖ Luke Hasenbank will reach back out to the cruise ship industry to solicit the vacant primary seat.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will:
    - ◊ Work with Vinnie Catalano to schedule a HSP Work Group meeting.
    - ◊ Reach out to Todd Duke and Dan Payne to schedule a Salvage and MFF Work Group meeting.
    - ◊ Continue outreach to members of the HSC for *On the Waterfront* LinkedIn reports.
    - ◊ Coordinate with Captain Mehler to organize a cleanup in the spring or summer.
    - ◊ Post a reminder of the upcoming drift fishing season on the CIHSC website.
    - ◊ Coordinate with LT Woodward and Kris Holderied to present at the fall CIHSC meeting.
    - ◊ Share the summary and materials shared during the meeting with the HSC.
    - ◊ Reach out to CIHSC members to schedule the next Committee meeting for Anchorage.

Next Meeting
The fall 2026 meeting will take place in Anchorage, held in conjunction with the Pre Winter meeting.

Adjourn
Captain Mehler thanked everyone for attending. Motion Todd Paxton, Vinnie Catalano to adjourn the meeting at 3:01pm AKDT. Meeting adjourned.

Meeting Materials: (1) Meeting Protocols, (2) CIHSC Roster, (3) October 16, 2025, Meeting Summary