

Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee

Meeting Summary

April 17, 2025

1:00pm – 4:00pm (AKDT)

BP Energy Center – 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, AK 99508

Committee Members:

Steve “Vinnie” Catalano, CIRCAC – Primary
Shaylon Cochran, CIRCAC – Alternate
David Martin, Commercial Fishing – Primary
Vicente “Ben” Cruz, Dry Cargo Ship Operators – Alternate
Suzann Speckman, Environmental – Alternate
Capt. 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 Duke, Salvage Organization – Primary
Luke Hasenbank, Ship Agents – Primary
Capt. Christopher Buckley, SWAPA – Alternate
Capt. Mark Maxim, Tanker Operators – Primary

Managing Board:

Mayor Peter Micciche, President
Mike Munger, Secretary/Treasurer

Capt. Paul Mehler, HSC Chair

Capt. Jeff Brue, Member

Ex Officio:

Carly Lynch, USACE
Capt. Christopher Culpepper, USCG
BMC Stephen Braun, USCG
CDR Christine Brown, USCG
LCDR Caroline Wilkinson, NOAA
Capt. Steve White, AK Marine Exchange

Other:

Haley Griffin, Nuka Research
Sierra Fletcher, Nuka Research
Kerry McClelland, K.s.M. Foundation
John Guthrie, PWSRCAC
Betty Hoffman, Alyeska Pipeline Service
Corrinne Lindfors, Port MacKenzie
Alistair Pepper, Global Diving & Salvage
Kendra Bulawa, Global Diving & Salvage

Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Captain Paul Mehler, HSC Chair, reviewed the agenda and called the fourteenth meeting of the Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee to order at 1:05 pm AKDT.

Captain Mehler led the Pledge of Allegiance, and reviewed meeting protocols and general housekeeping items. Ms. Haley Griffin led introductions for meeting attendees.

Approval of Agenda

Motion Bill Wolverton, Vinnie Catalano to approve the agenda as prepared. Motion passes by no objection.

Meeting Summary September 19, 2024

Motion Bryan Hawkins, Mr. Catalano to approve the September 19, 2024, meeting summary as prepared. Motion passes by no objection.

Round Table Committee Member Updates

Ronnie Poole reported that spring dredging has begun at the Port of Alaska, and the north and south float docks are in place. A contract is ready for a new Terminal 1. The North Extension Stabilization (NES 1) project, part of the Port’s Modernization Program, is underway and scheduled for completion in the fall. Upcoming training exercises with local fire departments and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) are planned. Captain Mehler asked whether observers could be invited to attend. Mr. Poole also mentioned that dredging at the Port’s small boat launch is scheduled before May 1 for a CISPRI exercise. The South Transit Building was recently demolished, and the Petroleum Cement Terminal (PCT)—which began receiving cement ships last summer—will be ready for tankers by the end of May.

Ben Cruz noted that favorable weather has kept ships on schedule and that Matson has increased USCG inspections. Suzann Speckman shared that the Harbor Safety Plan work group discussed ship strikes involving marine mammals but has yet to meet again to make progress. Shaylon Cochran reported the completion of a “Welcome to Cook Inlet” informational video for incoming federal and state agency personnel. Mr. Catalano described work on updating Geographic Response Strategies (GRS) for mariculture sites in Kachemak Bay and Kodiak and developing new ones for unprotected areas. He is also collaborating with CIRCAC’s Environmental Committee to establish radar and LiDAR sites to track surface currents in Cook Inlet and improve oil spill trajectories.

Captain Chris Buckley reported that SWAPA currently has 7 trainees and 12 deputies. He noted a slight increase in cruise ship traffic since 2024. Captain Mehler added that a few tankers are headed to drydock, new ships are entering the region, and synthetic crude is being imported from Canada. Overall, shipping activity is increasing. David Griffin shared that Port MacKenzie will host the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and USCG for a four-week operation in August 2025. The Port’s barge operating facility is 95% complete, with final funding sought for a 2026 completion. Navigation assessments from 2014 are being updated, with a focus on updating current data around the Port for use in simulations. AVTEC data and a contractor will be used to support these updates. Corrinne Lindfors, who attended with Mr. Griffin, will serve as his alternate on the Committee.

Bill Wolverton reported ongoing activity north of the KPL dock, including that Furie Operating Alaska renewed a lease with Hilcorp’s Spartan 151 to utilize their jack-up rig to drill a few more wells in Cook Inlet. There are also plans to expand the Tyonek platform by adding a leg and conductors, drilling four additional wells. In 2024, there were 632 boat callouts (including 110 barges), contributing to congestion in the area. Interest in carbon capture is growing, including the potential use of local docks for CO₂ delivery and reinjection back into platforms. With Ocean Renewable Power Company (ORPC) receiving a tidal generation permit, geotechnical work is underway to support future tidal energy generation. LNG import operations are also being considered in the region.

Todd Duke discussed a recent NTSB meeting on the Costa d’Avorio fire in New Jersey, which resulted in two firefighter fatalities. The last Marine Firefighting (MFF) training in Cook Inlet took place eight years ago and was co-sponsored by the PWS and Cook Inlet RCACs. Mr. Duke proposed reviving the two-day training program, which included hands-on exercises. Captain Mehler will follow up to explore re-establishing the Shipboard Marine fire department training program. Mr. Duke also informed the Committee that the USFWS and NOAA propose rescinding the definition of “harm” under the Endangered Species Act, opting instead to use the broader ESA definition of “take.” Committee members are encouraged to submit comments during the open comment period [here](#). Ms. Griffin will distribute the submission link.

Bryan Hawkins reported the decommissioning of the USCG Cutter Naushon in Homer. Federal fisheries began in March, with all licenses issued. A boat and trade show harbor festival is scheduled for June 7. SWAPA has relocated its office to the Homer Spit. Luke Hasenbank stated that tanker traffic into KPL and Anchorage is steady. The region anticipates a strong cruise season, with five ships scheduled for Anchorage and 11 for Homer. Military vessels will also be present in the Inlet. Cruise ship schedules are available at <https://claalaska.com>. Captain Brad Kroon raised concerns about potential NOAA weather forecasting budget cuts, emphasizing their importance to commercial operations. He also reported consistent ATV barge traffic in the Inlet.

David Martin shared that the drift fishery fleet in the Inlet has declined to half its previous size. However, communication between tankers and fishermen in the Inlet has been effective, with fishermen proactively calling tankers to report their locations. Mr. Martin expressed appreciation for this cooperation and the tankers’ responsiveness.

Ex-Officio Updates

USACE

Carly Lynch introduced herself to the Committee as the new Operations Branch Chief for the Alaska District of USACE, and shared that she will be working with 2 project managers. She also reported that USACE engages in annual dredging at Nome, Anchorage, Dillingham, Homer, and Ninilchik.

USCG

Captain Christopher Culpepper shared that the Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee (AIWSC) was unable to meet earlier in the week due to weather. He reported the recent decommissioning of USCG Cutters Naushon (Homer) and Mustang (Seward), recognizing their legacies of service in Alaska. The Liberty, the last of the 49 Island Class Cutters, will be decommissioned at the end of April. Looking ahead, three Sentinel Class Fast Response Cutters—John Witherspoon, Earl Cunningham, and Frederick Mann—will arrive in Alaska between June 2025 and November 2026. They will be homeported in Kodiak, bringing the state's total to six, with the others based in Ketchikan.

Infrastructure upgrades are ongoing, including the installation of permanent moorings in Women's Bay, in coordination with the Kodiak Harbormaster and Paradigm Marine. Stakeholders from across the state provided valuable feedback on communication efforts and regional development needs at Industry Day, held in late March. The USCG is working to allocate funding to support these initiatives and enhance maritime security. One tool aiding these efforts is the "CGIS Tips" app, which allows users to report suspicious activity, including harassment or assault aboard vessels.

The USCG will be increasing maritime security operations, with a particular focus on enhancing boarder security and protecting national sovereignty. This includes additional aviation assets, deployment of more National Security Cutters, and a planned multi-agency strike force operation under the DHS Border Enforcement Security Taskforce (BEST) initiative, known as "Northern Lights." Coordination is ongoing with the Department of Transportation (DOT) to identify fentanyl trafficking routes and warning signs. A U.S.–Canada Coast Guard summit will be held at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) during the first week of May, and will address topics such as maintaining unimpeded commerce, ensuring military mobility, and supporting subsistence activities.

The next Area Committee (AC) meeting is scheduled for May 7 at UAA Gorsuch Commons and is open to the public. The USCG will continue conducting Government Initiated Unannounced Exercises (GIUEs) to minimize assumptions and improve readiness. A GRS deployment is planned for May 1, highlighting the accessibility of a small boat launch ramp without a TWIC card—an important opportunity for observation. GRS are available on the ADEC website, and validation efforts are ongoing. Additionally, the Homeport webpage has been taken down as of April 12. Future updates will be shared through alternate methods such as text or email.

NOAA

LCDR Caroline Wilkinson reported that Port MacKenzie has been sharing bathymetry data outside of the Port ahead of the 2025 Arctic Edge drill. The NOAA research vessel *Fairwater* will be doing work in Southeast Alaska before heading offshore from Kodiak on a joint USGS project then along the Arctic Port Access Route to conduct a study for the USCG. Bathymetry maps were updated outside Kodiak Harbor after a request from the islands was made. Additional hydrographic survey work is planned as well.

LCDR Wilkinson stated that there have been some staffing challenges within the NWS, but they remain capable of providing weather services to all Alaskans, encouraging people to call them. Mayor Peter Micciche asked if there were any updates on addressing outages on weather data buoys. She replied that the *MV Bluefin* will be coming up to Alaska (pending contract approval) to service some of the NWS buoys, including Seal Rocks. The importance these buoys serve to communities has been emphasized.

MXAK

Captain Steve White reported on the Marine Safety Site Capabilities Maps that MXAK continues to build out, highlighting current capabilities of the organization. Areas for frequent response have been identified, and that map continues to be updated. Since May 2023, the information specialists at MXAK made over 200 broadcasts on behalf of the USCG and answered 10 distress calls, including 3 MAYDAY calls. MXAK continues working closely with the NWS to identify gaps and serve their members. The Marine Safety Site Capabilities Map can be found here: <https://www.mxak.org/about/>.

Managing Board Report

Mayor Micciche reported that the Committee is in its 11th year and expressed his appreciation to the members for filling the stakeholder seats. The Committee roster is nearly full! He asked members to reach out if they have individuals to fill in remaining vacancies, expressing his appreciation to Captain

Mehler for his efforts over the last few years and the work of the members to keep the region safe. He hopes to add the LNG Carriers' seat back to the roster. The Board is here to support the Committee's hard work and new activities.

HSC Chair Report

Captain Mehler reported that the HSC National Steering Team (NST) reached out to feature the Committee on their website, highlighting interest from other Committees in Cook Inlet's ice operations and Ice Guidelines. He noted that the Committee's website is continually updated, including the addition of a member spotlight section, and encouraged members to contribute. He also proposed a summer beach clean-up and an informal picnic to foster connection among members, inviting suggestions and participation. Coordination for these events will be handled with Ms. Griffin. Looking ahead, Captain Mehler aims to align the fall Committee meeting with the annual Pre-Winter Meeting, typically hosted by Marathon, and hopes to include participation from the USCG and shipping industry representatives.

Workgroup Reports

Navigation Work Group

Ms. Griffin shared that with Captain John Stewart stepping down from the Committee, a new chair for the Navigation Work Group is being sought out. If any Committee members are interested in filling this position, please reach out to Captain Mehler and Ms. Griffin.

Marine Fire Fighting (MFF)/Salvage Work Groups

Mr. Duke stated that work continues with the National MFF Taskforce to rewrite a nationwide template that will eventually become the Area MFF Plan. By the end of the year, a sufficient work product will be made public. Mr. Duke plans to present this to the Area Committee. Meetings have been taking place every week and involve approximately 150 people from across the U.S.

Harbor Safety Plan Work Group

Mr. Catalano reported that the Harbor Safety Plan (HSP) annual review cycle is set to begin again. He asked the Committee members to review their respective sections of the Plan and provide updates. After the updates are integrated into the Plan, it will be sent back to the Committee for a final review, then distributed for public comment before being finalized. The HSP is a document the Committee created, listing everything for mariners to know about operating in Cook Inlet. It is an evergreen document that will benefit from continued updates of the HSC members.

Facilitator's Report

Ms. Griffin shared the current vacancies and the process for members to recommend interested applicants. She also listed individuals with expiring seats and mentioned that she will reach out later in the year to confirm interest in retaining their committee seats.

Presentations

Environmental Challenges During the Salvage of the M/V Dali

Mr. Duke provided a detailed incident briefing on the collision of the container ship MV Dali with the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore on March 26, 2024. He outlined the significant environmental and operational challenges faced during the vessel's salvage. The collision with one of the bridge's support structures caused approximately 4,000 tons of bridge debris to collapse onto the ship, impacting both hazardous and non-hazardous cargo. At the time of the collapse, eight individuals were on the bridge—two survived, while six were later recovered during operations.

A key success of the response was the effective use of the Unified Command (UC) system. This collaborative framework enabled smooth coordination among all involved agencies and ensured a unified effort throughout the operation. A mixture of soybeans, hydro sulfonic acid, and rainwater created hazardous environmental conditions, producing carbon monoxide and hydrogen sulfide. This necessitated the use of Level A and B Hazmat Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Salvage and marine response personnel conducted extensive assessments, scoping out containers and measuring chemical levels before any cargo was removed.

UC secured the ship's cargo manifest, which allowed them to identify hazardous materials and take the necessary precautions for safe removal. Of the 56 containers carrying dangerous goods, 14 were located

in the damaged zone in the bow of the vessel. The complexity of the response was heightened by unseen hazards, including overhead high-voltage transmission lines and a 40-inch natural gas main running beneath the grounded vessel. While power and gas flow were halted, the pipeline continued to pose an explosion risk throughout the incident. Personnel from across the country—and internationally—were mobilized to support the effort. To maintain maritime traffic, two temporary shipping channels were established during the response: a 30-foot alternate channel and a 50-foot limited deep-draft access channel. As part of the salvage process, explosives were used to separate the collapsed bridge section from the vessel, but only after as much cargo as possible had been removed. Once the Dali was successfully refloated, it was transported to Norfolk, Virginia.

Salvage operations concluded on September 3, taking 55 days to stabilize and refloat the vessel, and a total of 131 days to clear debris and establish waste stream management. The final piece of the collapsed bridge was removed on July 15 in Virginia. Over the course of the 186-day response, 21 planning documents were developed and utilized. Specialized skills such as fire protection planning, structural collapse mitigation, shoring, and air monitoring played a critical role. Additionally, more than 40,000 tons of waste were generated during the incident. Response teams made concerted efforts to recycle materials wherever possible and ensured the safe disposal of all remaining waste. Despite the massive scale and complexity of the operation—and thousands of personnel hours logged—there were no fires, chemical spills, or personal injuries. Mr. Duke commended all agencies and personnel involved for their exemplary work in managing the incident and concluded by asking participants to consider the potential impacts if a similar incident were to occur at the Port of Alaska, the state's only major port.

Homer Harbor Expansion Project Briefing

Mr. Hawkins briefed the committee on the ongoing expansion project at Homer Harbor. The city first began discussions with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in 2004 about expanding the harbor. A key requirement for the project was a local rock source. Initially, rock was considered from Prince of Wales Island, but the high transportation costs significantly increased the project's overall expense, leading to a halt in progress. Homer Harbor, a 50-acre basin—the largest single basin in Alaska—experiences high levels of activity, creating a strong need for expansion. Approximately 400 individuals are currently on a waitlist for a harbor stall. Due to congestion, vessels already in the harbor often face delays getting underway.

A new study launched in 2023 estimated the expansion cost at \$4.2 million, with funding expected to be split evenly between federal and local sources. As part of the study, surveys were conducted among different user groups to identify those who comprise the Homer fleet. The fleet includes gillnetters, tugboats, recreational vessels, pilot boats, barges, cargo transport vessels, research vessels, ecotourism operators, water taxis, and others. The expansion aims to create sufficient space for all vessel types, support Homer's diverse economy, and improve safety and operational efficiency. Mr. Hawkins reviewed the study's considered alternatives (0 through 3), including a no-action option and various design proposals for an exterior harbor. These designs would accommodate deep-draft vessels, reduce rafting, expand moorage capacity, and provide upland space for local service facilities such as a fuel dock or barge ramp. Alternative 3 accounts for projected harbor growth over the next 50 years.

The study compares existing harbor conditions with those projected under each expansion scenario. One consideration is the potential to reduce vessel traffic on roadways through expanded port capacity. Mr. Hawkins also discussed design considerations to meet both current and future harbor needs. Some uncertainties remain, particularly regarding the effectiveness of geotechnical work related to upland development and land extensions.

A draft report will be released for public comment in September. Mr. Hawkins encouraged the committee to participate in the comment process. While local opposition has emerged around environmental concerns, the city has hosted public engagement meetings with concerned community members. Mayor Micciche commended the collaborative efforts of all involved with the community. Captain Mehler asked whether the committee could support the project, stating he would speak with the Board about drafting a letter of support. A tentative plan is expected to be selected by the end of June this year. USACE will make a final decision in March 2026, with the final report scheduled for production

in September 2026. The city of Homer will make the draft plan publicly available. For more information, visit: www.homerharborexansion.com

Port MacKenzie Operations and Capabilities Brief

Due to time constraints, David Griffin did not present this briefing. This presentation will be featured at the fall Committee meeting.

Public/Final Comments

Brad Kroon recommended that the Committee hosts a beach clean-up together with a BBQ lunch. Other Committee members expressed their support. Mr. Griffin asked about the increases in vessel traffic in the Inlet, to which Mr. Catalano replied that CIRCAC is in the process of finalizing a vessel traffic report for the Inlet. He stated that he would share the report with Mr. Griffin and other interested parties.

Review Action Items & Set Next Meeting

Captain Mehler and Ms. Griffin outlined the action items.

- ❖ Captain Mehler will follow up with Mr. Poole and Ms. Griffin regarding information for observers at the Port of Alaska's training exercises.
- ❖ Captain Mehler will speak with Mr. Paxton regarding observers at CISPRI's upcoming exercise.
- ❖ Captain Mehler will follow up with Mr. Duke to discuss needs for re-establishing the Shipboard Marine fire department training program.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will send a link to the Committee for submitting comments on the USFWS/NOAA proposal to rescind the definition of 'harm' under the ESA.
- ❖ Captain Mehler will work with Ms. Griffin to discuss logistics for a beach clean-up and picnic.
- ❖ Committee members will reach out to Captain Mehler and Ms. Griffin if interested in the Navigation Work Group Chair position.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will distribute the Harbor Safety Plan to Committee members for review and updates.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will continue outreach to members of the HSC for *On the Waterfront* LinkedIn reports.
- ❖ The Board will discuss providing a Letter of Support for the Homer Port Expansion project.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will include David Griffin's Port MacKenzie presentation in the fall meeting agenda.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will share the summary and materials shared during the meeting with the HSC.
- ❖ Ms. Griffin will share the meeting presentations on the CIHSC website.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on October 16, 2025. This meeting will be held in conjunction with the Pre-Winter Meeting in Anchorage.

Adjourn

Captain Mehler thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting at 3:55 pm AKDT.

Meeting Materials: (1) Meeting Protocols, (2) CIHSC Roster, (3) September 19, 2024, Meeting Summary, (4) List of Work Group Members