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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

U. S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL WILLIAM J. ECKER

ON BOATING SAFETY AND THE BOAT SAFETY ACCOUNT

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND NAVIGATION

COMMITTEE ON MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES

19 MAY 1989



REAR ADMIRAL WILLIAM J. ECKER
COMMANDER, SECOND COAST GUARD DISTRICT



Rear Admiral William J. Ecker became Commander of the Second Coast Guard District headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri in March 1989. He was Chief of Staff of the Fifth Coast Guard District when selected for flag rank.

His previous two assignments were Chief of Operations at the Ninth District for one year, and Deputy Chief in the Office of Marine Safety, Security and Environmental Protection for two years in Washington, DC.

Rear Admiral Ecker is a 1960 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy. He served in consecutive sea-going assignments during his first two tours of duty. His first was in Cutter WESTWIND, where he served as deck and engineering watch officer, and later in Cutter WINNEBAGO, where his responsibilities included damage control and assistant engineer duties.

He was then assigned to the Marine Inspection Office in San Francisco. After that he returned to sea for tours as the engineering officer aboard the cutters RESOLUTE and MELLON. The tour in MELLON included deployment to Vietnam. Following that, Rear Admiral Ecker was assigned for three years as an assistant professor in the engineering department at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. From the academy, he moved to Coast Guard Headquarters as Chief of the Information and Analysis Branch in the Office of Merchant Marine Safety.

Rear Admiral Ecker's next assignment was as Executive Officer and then Commanding Officer of the Marine Inspection Office in New Orleans. This was followed by a short tour as Commander, Marine Safety Office Mobile, Alabama.

Rear Admiral Ecker is the recipient of a number of decorations, including the Meritorious Service Medal (2), the Coast Guard Commendation Medal (4), the Navy Commendation Medal, the Commandant's Letter of Commendation Ribbon (2), Coast Guard Unit Commendation Ribbon, Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the RVN Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, and the RVN Campaign Medal.

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Rear Admiral Ecker is married and has three children.

STATEMENT OF RADM WILLIAM J. ECKER, COMMANDER SECOND COAST GUARD DISTRICT
ON BOATING SAFETY AND THE BOAT SAFETY ACCOUNT BEFORE THE COAST GUARD AND
NAVIGATION SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES
COMMITTEE ON 19 MAY 1989 IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

GOOD MORNING MR. CHAIRMAN. THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY AT
THIS FIELD HEARING ON ISSUES RELATED TO RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY.

I WILL FOCUS MY COMMENTS ON THE BOATING SAFETY PROGRAM IN THE SECOND
COAST GUARD DISTRICT FROM FOUR PERSPECTIVES: SEARCH AND RESCUE, EDUCATION,
ALCOHOL ABUSE, AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATES.

LOCATED IN THE HEARTLAND OF AMERICA, THE SECOND COAST GUARD DISTRICT
INCLUDES NEARLY 7,000 MILES OF NAVIGABLE WATERWAYS IN A 22 STATE AREA
STRETCHING FROM WYOMING TO WEST VIRGINIA, AND FROM MINNESOTA TO LOUISIANA.
UNITS IN THE SECOND DISTRICT INCLUDE 18 RIVER BUCY TENDERS, SIX MARINE SAFETY
OFFICES, NINE MARINE SAFETY DETACHMENTS, FOUR DIRECTOR OF AUXILIARY OFFICES, A
LORAN STATION AND AN OMEGA STATION.

THE COAST GUARD IN THE SECOND DISTRICT, SIMILAR TO THE COAST GUARD
OVERALL, RELIES QUITE HEAVILY ON THE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY TO CARRY OUT MOST
OF ITS RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY PROGRAMS. THIS IS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH
TRAINING, PUBLIC EDUCATION, COURTESY MARINE EXAMINATIONS, AND ON-THE-WATER
PATROLS. A SLOW, BUT CONSTANT, DECLINE IN NATIONWIDE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY
MEMBERSHIP OVER A TEN YEAR PERIOD WAS REVERSED IN 1987, AND FORTUNATELY THE
UPTURN IS CONTINUING.

THE COAST GUARD'S TRADITIONAL SEARCH AND RESCUE MISSION IS UNIQUE ON THE
WESTERN RIVERS OF THE SECOND DISTRICT IN THAT THERE ARE NO SEARCH AND RESCUE
STATIONS. THE LAST SEARCH AND RESCUE STATION IN THE DISTRICT, LOUISVILLE
LIFEBOAT STATION, WAS CLOSED IN 1972. BECAUSE THE SECOND DISTRICT EXTENDS
OVER SUCH A LARGE GEOGRAPHIC AREA, THE COAST GUARD RELIES HEAVILY ON THE COAST
GUARD AUXILIARY, LOCAL MARINE POLICE, FIRE DEPARTMENTS, STATE CONSERVATION

AGENCIES, AND OTHERS TO RESPOND TO DISTRESS CALLS FROM THE MORE THAN 2.6 MILLION REGISTERED BOATS IN THIS DISTRICT.

LAST YEAR (FY88), THROUGHOUT THE SECOND DISTRICT, THE COAST GUARD CONDUCTED 2,293 SEARCH AND RESCUE CASES, SAVED THE LIVES OF 48 MARINERS, ASSISTED 8,500 OTHER PERSONS IN NEED, AND PREVENTED THE DAMAGE OR LOSS OF HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS WORTH OF PROPERTY. ON THE OTHER HAND, REGULAR COAST GUARD ASSETS HAVE BEEN INSUFFICIENT TO MEET THE ENORMOUS DEMANDS GENERATED BY LARGE ON-THE-WATER FUNCTIONS SUCH AS THE RIVERBEND FESTIVAL IN CHATTANOOGA, THE TALL STACKS REGATTA IN CINCINNATI LAST SUMMER, THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER RACE, OR EVEN THE NUMEROUS SMALLER SAILING REGATTAS WHICH ARE HELD HERE EACH SUMMER ON OLD HICKORY LAKE. IN THESE INSTANCES, AS WELL AS DURING ROUTINE SUMMERTIME AND WEEKEND BOATING ACTIVITIES AND SPECIAL EVENTS, AUXILIARY AUGMENTATION IS INVALUABLE. AUXILIARISTS CONDUCT ON-THE-WATER PATROLS WHERE THEY VOLUNTEER THEIR OWN FACILITIES AND TIME TO PERFORM SAFETY PATROLS, REGATTA PATROLS, AND NON-EMERGENCY SEARCH AND RESCUE MISSIONS. IN CALENDAR YEAR 1988 THE SECOND DISTRICT AUXILIARY COMPILED OVER 27,000 PATROL HOURS ON-THE-WATER, SAVED 55 LIVES, ASSISTED 5,200 BOATERS AND PREVENTED DAMAGE TO OVER \$19 MILLION DOLLARS WORTH OF PROPERTY. IN THE SECOND DISTRICT THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 3,500 ACTIVE AUXILIARISTS, COMPARED TO ONLY 775 ACTIVE DUTY COAST GUARD PEOPLE. IN TENNESSEE, THERE ARE 15 AUXILIARY FLOTILLAS WITH OVER 400 MEMBERS, WITH FOUR FLOTILLAS COMPRISED OF 114 AUXILIARISTS LOCATED RIGHT HERE IN THE NASHVILLE AREA. THE COAST GUARD, THE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY, THE STATES AND LOCAL AGENCIES ASSIST EACH OTHER IN THE SAVING OF LIVES AND PROPERTY WHEN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS ARISE. THE BOATING SAFETY ACCOUNT OF THE AQUATIC RESOURCES TRUST FUND HAS MADE THIS TYPE OF COOPERATION POSSIBLE, AND HAS FOSTERED AN EVER INCREASING ROLE FOR THE STATES AND LOCAL AGENCIES IN THE RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY PROGRAM.

ADDRESSING EDUCATION, MY SECOND AREA OF EMPHASIS, THE U.S. POWER SQUADRONS AND THE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY, ALONG WITH THE STATES, PROVIDE THE

MAJOR ROLE IN EDUCATING THE BOATING PUBLIC. WHILE THE POWER SQUADRONS AND THE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY HAVE BEEN THE TRADITIONAL BOATING EDUCATORS, THE STATES HAVE MADE AN ENTRY IN RECENT YEARS IN THIS AREA. STATE BOATING SAFETY COURSES OR BASIC BOATING BROCHURES ARE OFFERED IN ALL OF THE 22 STATES IN THE SECOND COAST GUARD DISTRICT. THE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY IS PERHAPS BEST KNOWN FOR PROVIDING SAFE BOATING EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO BOATERS OF ALL AGE GROUPS. THESE PROGRAMS ARE PRESENTED IN AUXILIARY CLASSROOMS OR IN NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS. NATIONWIDE, MORE THAN 5 MILLION PLEASURE BOATERS, ADULTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE, HAVE ATTENDED COAST GUARD AUXILIARY SAFE BOATING CLASSES SINCE 1969. ALMOST 7,500 PERSONS TOOK AUXILIARY BOATING SAFETY COURSES IN THE SECOND DISTRICT LAST YEAR. THE AUXILIARY IS A MAJOR FORCE IN TRAINING NOVICES IN THE PRINCIPLES AND TECHNIQUES OF BOATING SAFETY. MEMBERS OF THE AUXILIARY ALSO TAUGHT STATE PRODUCED COURSES IN NINE STATES IN THE SECOND DISTRICT LAST YEAR.

ANOTHER COAST GUARD AUXILIARY CONTRIBUTION TO SAFETY ON THE WATER IS THE VESSEL EXAMINATION PROGRAM, IN WHICH A FREE COURTESY MARINE EXAMINATION IS OFFERED TO RECREATIONAL BOAT OWNERS TO INSURE THEIR FACILITIES ARE PROPERLY EQUIPPED FOR SAFE OPERATION. AUXILIARY COURTESY MARINE EXAMINERS NATIONWIDE HAVE GIVEN MORE THAN 4 MILLION OF THESE FREE SAFETY CHECKS TO PLEASURE BOATERS SINCE 1969, AND THEY CONDUCTED ALMOST 33,000 COURTESY MARINE EXAMINATIONS IN THE SECOND DISTRICT LAST YEAR.

CONFRONTED WITH TODAY'S DRAMATIC INCREASES IN BOATING AS A PASTIME, WITH 72.5 MILLION PERSONS INVOLVED NATIONWIDE, RECREATIONAL BOATING IS A MAJOR FORM OF OUTDOOR SPORT. THE COAST GUARD LOOKS TO THE STATES, THE POWER SQUADRONS, THE AUXILIARY AND OTHERS TO TRY TO KEEP PACE WITH INCREASED EDUCATIONAL AND SAFETY AWARENESS PROGRAMS. YET BEST ESTIMATES ARE THAT ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THE BOATING PUBLIC IS BEING REACHED WITH ANY KIND OF FORMALIZED BOATING EDUCATION PROGRAM. RECOGNIZING THE NEED TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION PROGRAMS, NATIONAL SAFE BOATING WEEK HIGHLIGHTS EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND TARGETS THE SMALL BOATER WHO USES A BOAT FOR FISHING,

HUNTING, WATERSKIING OR OCCASIONAL CRUISING. NATIONAL SAFE BOATING WEEK IS JUNE 4 THROUGH JUNE 10 THIS YEAR. AND, AGAIN, THE THEME IS "KNOW BEFORE YOU GO."

MY THIRD AREA OF EMPHASIS IS THE ISSUE OF ALCOHOL ABUSE IN THE RECREATIONAL BOATING COMMUNITY. WE BELIEVE THAT ALCOHOL ABUSE IS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN AT LEAST 50% OF REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENTS. OPERATING A VESSEL WHILE INTOXICATED BECAME A FEDERAL OFFENSE IN 1984, AND VIOLATORS BECAME SUBJECT TO CIVIL (\$1,000) AND CRIMINAL (\$5,000, ONE YEAR IN JAIL OR BOTH) PENALTIES AFTER JANUARY 13, 1988. THE KEY TO AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN AGAINST DRUNK BOATING IS TO COUPLE AN AGGRESSIVE EDUCATION AND PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN WITH STRONG ENFORCEMENT STANDARDS. CURRENT STANDARDS INCLUDE BEHAVIORAL SIGNS OF INTOXICATION, AN INDEPENDENT BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION (BAC), AND A PRESUMPTION OF INTOXICATION IF TESTING IS REFUSED. THE BAC LEVEL FOR INTOXICATION IS .10 PERCENT FOR RECREATIONAL VESSEL OPERATORS AND .04 PERCENT FOR OPERATORS OF COMMERCIAL VESSELS. THE LAW IS FLEXIBLE IN THAT FEDERAL STANDARDS WILL CONFORM TO ANY FORMALLY ENACTED STATE BAC STANDARD - HIGHER OR LOWER THAN .10 PERCENT FOR RECREATIONAL INCIDENTS - ON WATERS WITHIN THE GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES OF THAT STATE.

THE STATE OF TENNESSEE HAS JUST PASSED A STATE LAW IN APRIL OF THIS YEAR WHICH PROHIBITS OPERATION OF A RECREATIONAL BOAT WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRUGS OR ALCOHOL AND SETS THE LEVEL OF "OPERATING UNDER THE INFLUENCE" AT .10 BLOOD ALCOHOL CONTENT.

THE MOMENTUM TO REQUIRE SOBRIETY WHILE BOATING IS BUILDING NATIONWIDE. MOST STATES EITHER HAVE SATISFACTORY INTOXICATED BOATER LAWS OR ARE WORKING TOWARD STRENGTHENING THEIR LAWS.

UNFORTUNATELY, LAST YEAR'S COAST GUARD BUDGET SHORTFALL PREVENTED ACQUISITION OF NEEDED BAC TEST EQUIPMENT, AND TRAINING OF COAST GUARD PEOPLE TO USE SUCH EQUIPMENT, TO ENFORCE THE NEW STANDARDS. THIS SUMMER, THE EIGHTH AND FIFTH COAST GUARD DISTRICTS WILL BE CONDUCTING A TRIAL ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

USING BREATHALYZER EQUIPMENT ON BOARD SMALL BOATS WHOSE CREWS HAVE BEEN TRAINED IN ITS USE. THE RESULTS OF THAT TRIAL PROGRAM WILL BE INCORPORATED COAST GUARD-WIDE IN THE SUMMER OF 1990. IN THE INTERIM, WE WILL CONTINUE CURRENT ENFORCEMENT METHODS, WHICH INCLUDE:

- TERMINATING A VOYAGE FOR REASON OF ANY UNSAFE CONDITION.
- CITING FOR NEGLIGENT OR GROSSLY NEGLIGENT OPERATIONS.
- REQUESTING ASSISTANCE FROM LOCAL OR STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL TO ADMINISTER CHEMICAL TESTING IF NECESSARY.

THE SECOND DISTRICT AUXILIARY PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAM, WHICH IS PART OF THE AUXILIARY PUBLIC EDUCATION EFFORT, MADE OVER 6,000 PUBLIC APPEARANCES AND PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS IN 1988, MANY HIGHLIGHTING THE SUBJECT OF INTOXICATED BOATERS. ATTENTION CONTINUES TO BE FOCUSED ON THIS PROBLEM THROUGH PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ARTICLES RELEASED TO LOCAL MEDIA. THE DANGERS OF ALCOHOL WILL BE ONE OF THE PROBLEMS EMPHASIZED IN THE NATIONAL SAFE BOATING WEEK CAMPAIGN. NOW THAT WE HAVE SOME OF THE TOOLS TO GRAPPLE WITH THE ALCOHOL PROBLEM, I AM OPTIMISTIC THAT WE SHALL SEE A REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS ATTRIBUTABLE TO BOATING WHILE INTOXICATED.

WITH RESPECT TO STATE RELATIONSHIPS, MY FOURTH AREA, WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE COAST GUARD AND INDIVIDUAL STATES CONTINUE TO BE EXCELLENT AND PRODUCTIVE IN ALL RESPECTS. PREVIOUS SECOND DISTRICT COMMANDERS HAVE NEGOTIATED WRITTEN AGREEMENTS WITH ALL OF THE STATES IN THIS DISTRICT, ADDRESSING BOATING SAFETY ISSUES SUCH AS SEARCH AND RESCUE, PUBLIC EDUCATION, BOATING CASUALTY INVESTIGATION AND REPORTS, REGATTA PATROLS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT. EACH STATE BOATING LAW ADMINISTRATOR (SBLA) HAS AN ONGOING WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH MY BOATING SAFETY DIVISION. A COAST GUARD AUXILIARY LIAISON OFFICER TO THE SBLA HAS ALSO BEEN APPOINTED IN EACH STATE. COAST GUARD HEADQUARTERS IS PRESENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF HIRING TO FILL FOUR NEW POSITIONS TO BOLSTER OUR NATIONWIDE STATE LIAISON EFFORTS. THESE POSITIONS

WILL ENABLE US TO BETTER ASSESS WALLOP-BREAUX STATE GRANT FUND ALLOCATION AND USE, AND WORK DIRECTLY WITH THE STATES TO EVALUATE AND IMPROVE THEIR PROGRAMS.

IN TENNESSEE, LT BLYTHE, THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF AUXILIARY, HAS BEEN MAINTAINING CLOSE LIAISON WITH STATE OFFICIALS. HE IS A MEMBER OF BOTH THE TENNESSEE STATE TASK FORCE ON BOATING SAFETY AND THE TENNESSEE WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY WATER SAFETY COUNCIL. LT BLYTHE HAS ALSO BEEN SELECTED TO WORK WITH THE WATER SAFETY COUNCIL IN DEVELOPING AND REFINING THE STATE'S BOATING SAFETY COURSE, AND WILL PROVIDE ASSISTANCE, AS REQUESTED, IN ANY STATE LEGISLATION IN THIS ARENA. OUR COMMUNICATIONS AND COOPERATION WITH THE STATES HAVE GROWN STRONGER EACH YEAR AS THEY EMBRACE A HEIGHTENED ROLE IN RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY ON THE WATER AND IN THE CLASSROOM.

IN CONCLUSION, THE REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF FATALITIES IN THE FIFTEEN STATES WITHIN THE LIAISON JURISDICTION OF THE SECOND COAST GUARD DISTRICT IS REFLECTIVE OF THE NATIONAL TREND. THERE WERE 23 FEWER FATALITIES, DOWN TO 153, IN THESE STATES IN 1988 THAN IN 1987. NATIONWIDE, THE NUMBER OF REPORTED FATALITIES HIT A NEW RECORD LOW OF 946 IN 1988, A RATE OF 5.5 FATALITIES PER 100,000 BOATS. STATE BOATING SAFETY PROGRAMS ARE A MAJOR REASON FOR THIS SUCCESS. WITH THE REAUTHORIZATION OF EXPENDITURES FROM THE BOAT SAFETY ACCOUNT OF THE AQUATIC RESOURCES TRUST FUND THROUGH 1993, I LOOK FOR CONTINUED STATE CONTRIBUTIONS TO BOATING SAFETY. OUR CHALLENGE NOW IS TO BUILD UPON THE MUTUAL SPIRIT OF SUPPORT AND COOPERATION AMONG ALL RECREATIONAL BOATING ORGANIZATIONS AND REGULATORS, SO THE WATERWAYS WILL BECOME EVEN SAFER IN THE FUTURE.