

Harbor (in)Security. Also: Harbor Events.

by Peter B. Fleischer
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In recent weeks, New York's elected officials, including Senator Charles Schumer and Congressman Anthony Weiner, have identified harbor security as an essential piece of the region's post-9/11 response. New York harbor has numerous strategic and potentially vulnerable waterfront sites such as oil depots, airports, docks and bridges. Citing the risk of terrorists and weapons of mass destruction arriving on ships or in containers through the port of New York and New Jersey, the officials have called for much more security.

The Coast Guard, already involved and stretched thin, has been recruited to augment these efforts. Inspections of freighters bound for New York will occur out at sea. The Coast Guard reports that boardings have increased seven-fold. FBI inspection of cargo manifests and ship personnel will begin four days prior to a ship's arrival in the harbor (compared to the one day that it is currently).

Technological methods to efficiently detect people and dangerous materials within containers entering the port are being developed on an expedited basis. Ironically, the globalization process that spurred increased use of container transport, moving ever faster from ship to truck and rail and then on to the nation's interior, now brings the threat of global terror to all parts of the U.S.

Coast Guard security provisions put in place after September 11th continue to constrain recreational water users including jet skiers, kayakers, and boaters. The Coast Guard enforces strict off-limit zones near bridge supports, power plants and port facilities.

Fleet Week

The U.S. Navy, Coast Guard and naval vessels from Canada and Denmark will make their annual entry into the Port of New York for the period of May 22 to May 29th. Amphibious Assault craft, guided missile cruisers and anti-mine vessels will highlight the visit. Since 1984, this annual rite is the Navy's way of showing appreciation to New York and other port towns around the country. Fleet Week also serves to build and rally the Navy's constituencies. Typically, over 200,000 New Yorkers visit the ships and view the Parade of Ships. The naval vessels will be berthed along West Street on the Hudson River near Pier 86. Some exhibits will take place in Staten Island.

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Waterfront Conference

On May 15th, the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance's Waterfront Conference convened in the cavernous and once grand Hoboken terminal on the New Jersey waterfront and in the damaged but still impressive World Financial Center in Battery Park City. Those morning and afternoon locations were linked by a lunch cruise on the river on a New York Waterway ferry.

Dennis Suszkowski of the Hudson River Foundation presented research detailing the declining levels of pollutants and heavy metals in the harbor's water and sediments. He noted twenty-five years of improvements from 1974 to 1998. The conference keynote speaker was New Jersey Governor James McGreevey, who talked about "improving access to the waterfront, enhancing parks and waterfront facilities, and making the eighteen-mile Hudson River Waterfront Walkway a reality."

Led by its president Kent Barwick, the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance has, over the last two years (since the last conference) assembled a diverse group of commercial, environmental, governmental and recreational interests concerned with the ongoing development and use of the city's waterfront. It has prominently proposed the Harbor Loop Ferry as a means to bring New Yorkers and tourists to the harbor's reaches and possibly trigger development in underused harbor niches.

The Flotilla

On June 2nd, an ad hoc flotilla of hundreds of watercraft ranging from historic sailboats to powerboats to locally built rowboats and kayaks will meet in the waters off the Battery and from there descend upon Governors Island. The Flotilla, the brainchild of Al Butzel and Carter Craft, and sponsored by www.ReclaimGovernorsIsland.org seeks to focus attention on Governors Island, arguably the most valuable, underutilized parcel of land on the metropolitan area waterfront. Organizers hope to make the point that the 175-acre, mid-harbor island should be made available for public use, open space, historical and cultural awareness as well as educational pursuits. The island has been virtually unused since the Coast Guard left New York.



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Peter B. Fleischer, currently writing a book on the New York City waterfront, was formerly a transportation and environment policy advisor to New York City Mayors David Dinkins and Rudy Giuliani.