

**World Maritime Day**  
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**Homeland Security Impacts on Seafarers**

*Presenter:*

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In my work as the Executive Director and Port Chaplain at the Seamen's Church Institute in Philadelphia, PA and in the North American Maritime Ministry Association, I have attended many maritime business conferences.

**What has struck me over the years is that seafarers are often only an afterthought, if ever mentioned, during these heady deliberations.** They are merely seen as assets to be deployed on a just-in-time basis. I appreciate once again the opportunity to raise awareness of what seafarers do for security and safety in shipping.

Since 2003 I have served on the Area Maritime Security Committee Sector Delaware Bay and its Managing Board. I am one of the few port chaplains serving in this role on an AMSC. The relationships between USCG, industry and maritime ministry have been incredibly effective in our sector. We have had few access issues over these last eight years. And that is a unique record given the experiences of my colleagues around the country.

Homeland security has had enormous impact upon the quality of life of seafarers, especially since the advent of TWIC. Paradoxically, the unintended consequences of security regulations are that they anger the very people who are to be our allies in security: seafarers. Many seafarers tell us that the US is worse than Russia. That comment comes from Russian seafarers, they should know best.

Following 9/11 the maritime industry effectively eliminated shore leave for most seafarers. Every petrochemical terminal in my port shut their gates to seafarer access for shore leave. Slowly, they relaxed their rules and recognized that seafarers could be securely escorted by local seafarer centers. Visa rules were also tightened up and crew list visas were eliminated. Crew list visas were a relief valve for crew members unable to get a regular visa. Currently 15-20% of seafarers do not possess US visas and thereby are denied shore leave. Other CBP procedures have only exacerbated conditions onboard ship, such as the 29 day rule. If a seafarer has not gone to a foreign port within 29 days, his shore pass is revoked.

In 2008 TWIC came into effect. This security program eliminated the ability of seafarers to move around a terminal, go to a pier side public phone or access the gate on their own. 40% of our terminals used to allow this means of access; now seafarers must wait for our vans to escort them.

During this period of time a number of terminals throughout the country also began to implement policies that seafarers and even chaplains, ship agents and pilots had to use an outside security service for transportation, often at a cost of \$300 and up. Some of those security companies were owned by the very managers of these terminals. The USCG Act 2010, section 811 now expressly forbids this practice with the provision that there must be a "system" for "timely access" at "no cost to the individual". Those of us in maritime ministry are grateful for this provision. But to interject a bit of theology, "the Devil is in the Details".

The National Maritime Security Advisory Committee wrestled with this provision during this past spring and I had an opportunity to be a part of several conference calls. There was a broad range of concerns and an equally broad range of disagreements about how to formulate regulations for this section. I am sure that USCG can formulate regulations that proscribe what is a “system”, what “timely” means and “at no cost to the individual”. What cannot be solved through regulation is the fact that access is not free and will never be free. Somebody is paying for seafarer access to shore leave. The overwhelming cost is borne by seafarer centers in every port. This is not a sustainable business model. Let me explain why this is.

Last year the North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA) did an informal survey regarding seafarer access to shore leave and transportation services. 12 centers responded. They visited 193 terminals and transported 85,822 seafarers for shore leave during the previous year. 17% of the terminals restricted access totally and 68% required seafarer centers to provide transportation exclusively. The annual transportation costs were \$1.4 million and the extrapolated annual cost for all NAMMA centers would be in the range of \$4-5 million per year – a direct subsidy to shipping companies and terminals.

On a local level, let me share the financial challenges we face to provide this “free” transportation on the Delaware River. Our average cost to provide transportation is \$206/ship. We service 31 terminals along 125 miles of river frontage. Our annual transportation costs are \$350,000, which is roughly equal to our annual deficit. If it were not for the support of our churches and their members, we could not sustain this operation. As it is, we must draw from investments to keep this high level of service going. And SCI is one of the more solvent seafarer centers in the country.

I have reached out to shipping companies to encourage them to support our work for the benefit of their crews. One executive of the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest container shipping company proudly informed me that they would not support our \$110 invoice for this vital service. Another even larger container line which does not honor our invoice system either recently gave us a small grant of \$750 – equal to \$16 per ship of that line that we served this past year. And what is the daily cost of that ship - \$50,000+?

Maritime Ministries are really “an extension of an owner’s HR department throughout the world.” What many ship owners and others in the maritime industry do not understand is the important contributions maritime ministries make to the bottom line of ship operations:

**Most cost effective providers of welfare services to crews** – Ship owners could not possibly afford these services for their seafarers that maritime ministries provide on their behalf. Sadly, most owners do not recognize or support this work on a consistent basis throughout the ports that they call upon.

**Crisis counseling in times of death or accidents** – Because of the pastoral skills of chaplains and ship visitors, we are able care for seafarers in these crisis moments. The impact on crew morale and ship operations is substantial when someone dies (either seafarer or family member) or is injured. Ask any captain who has been through these experiences just how helpless he feels in trying to deal with these situations.

**Advocates for seafarers regarding shore leave and security** – Frankly, if it were not for chaplains advocating with the Coast Guard and Congress, we would still be operating at the inhumane levels of shore leave denial post 9/11. This is largely not understood by the industry but acknowledged by the Coast Guard and others. During the early part of the decade, ship owners were afraid to even confront their terminal operator partners on this issue for fear of losing business. It was chaplains who made the challenge, port by port, terminal by terminal.

**Mediation within the workplace** – Inevitably, there are workplace tensions aboard ship and they impact ship operations significantly. Who is going to listen to an aggrieved seafarer concerned about working conditions and how he is being treated by his superiors? Ratings are at a great disadvantage and have no advocate for them onboard. Seasoned chaplains and ship visitors are often able to bring reconciliation to these situations.

**Active players in the maritime security arena** – Many chaplains have been actively involved in maritime security policies and operations since 2003. In my case, I have been a member of the local Area Maritime Security Committee and its Managing Board since 2003. In this role, I have been able to advocate for the needs of seafarers in the context of expanded security regulations and broker agreements on security policies at local terminals.

For this industry to presume that seafarer centers will always be there, you should know that seafarer centers are rapidly closing because they do not have enough financial support to continue operating. Just this year LA/Long Beach, Jacksonville, Corpus Christi and Burns Harbor centers have closed or are closing by the end of the year. Given our economy, this trend will continue. Once closed, centers rarely reopen. What that means for all the great regulations, effectively seafarers will be denied access because no one cares enough to support this work.

In conclusion, will we be any safer with cooped up seafarers, denied shore leave access for the lack of resources to pay for it? I doubt it. That we can spend \$100's of millions on DHS port security grants each year but cannot afford to pay for something that really helps in sustaining security though an investment in human beings is at best counter productive to our security needs in the maritime industry. Now, in a recent report, the GAO advocates for even more strict screening rules for seafarer shore leave access. Our security regimes are not only destroying the quality of life for seafarers but also slowly destroying our maritime industry. Will we have to go back to the practice of impressing seafarers to make maritime trade continue? Right now, my fellow chaplains feel our country is holding seafarers hostage with misguided security regulations that make little sense and violate basic human standards of decency and hospitality.

Thank you.