

NATCHEZ ON THE WATERFRONT **SECURITY – BAH HUMBUG ... WELL, MAYBE NOT**

Security. Time was when this word didn't conger up thoughts of 9/11, terrorism and counter-terrorism. But times have changed. And now we are perhaps as or more likely to think of the latter than the more mundane issues of preventing theft and vandalism at the marina. I'll try to touch on both connotations.

Today, with the buildup of coastlines, urban sprawl and the development of marinas in addition to major port facilities, security takes on a new perspective and can be thought of in terms of two major categories – for the marina itself, including the boats and physical plant, and as a means of access from land to water, or vice versa.

But have they really? From ancient times the waterways of the world have provided the avenues for transport for both commerce as well as war. The Vikings were noted for ruling the waves, Ancient Greek and Roman Empires were built around the water. And waterfront even in ancient times security was an issue with most harbors being fortified and protected against hostile attacks as well as protecting the vessels therein.

Marinas have been in operation for decades, so in this day and age do we need to worry about security? Many old salts have said, bah humbug- all we need are a few good baseball bats. But times have changed and perhaps there are other approaches one should consider.

Today, with the buildup of coastlines, urban sprawl and the development of marinas in addition to major port facilities, security takes on a new perspective and can be thought of in terms of two major categories – for the marina itself, including the boats and physical plant, and as a water access point.

Since 9/11 in the US as well as numerous incidents in other countries around the world – waterfront security has once again become a more heightened concern. While the bigger news tends to focus on issues with ports, their associated industrial facilities and whether they are or are not secure, there has also been considerable attention given to the role of recreational boating facilities. Marinas throughout the world provide access points from the land to the water – as well as from the water to the land. That access most often is a good thing, and, in fact, access to the waters and the waterfront is greatly encouraged by most governments the world over. But along with access for the public good also comes some measure of opportunity for the public harm and in some cases requirements by governments for security for the area and region.

One of the greatest concerns with access to the water from land has involved marinas on reservoirs or other public water supplies, and the opportunity to poison a water supply or have access to a dam. One of the greatest concerns in the other direction, from water to land, involves the opportunity to gain entry to or exit from a country or specific area thereof for either terrorists or their potential weapons. In some ways the latter opportunity is less “new” in that such concerns have been part of the “war on drugs” and efforts to curb illegal immigration for years. But somehow the stakes do seem higher.

In many Asian countries, the governments are most concerned about boats coming and leaving their country and knowing what is transpiring. Similarly throughout the world, governments are taking on a much more proactive and intervention approach than ever before.

If a facility is host to foreign or transient vessels, or group or party boats, there are many concerns that surface. In the US, marinas are being required to assess their waterfront facilities, devise plans for handling and reporting activities for larger boats, party/group boats (including ferries, fishing boats, sightseeing boats, etc.), domestic as well as foreign transient boats.

In point of fact, big brother is watching over you and wanting to know what's going on. Such approaches are not unique to the United States, although the US seems to be leading the way in developing a coordinated reporting and waterfront security system. Countries from Asia to Europe as well as most every other continent are becoming more and more concerned about securing their waterfronts and knowing what's happening.

At the same time, security of a more traditional nature has also been increased at many facilities. While a few old salts have said, bah humbug- all we need are a few good baseball bats, the facts are that times have changed and perhaps there are other approaches one should consider. The values of the customers' boats at a typical marina, once having averaged in the range of \$3,000 to \$50,000, now typically can range from \$30,000 to over \$500,000 and more. And that's not just inflation at work. All the added bells and whistles, especially the electronic devices, from radios, satellite communications, depth finders, and autopilots (to name a few), can easily run well above the tens of thousands of dollars. Such features can be very attractive temptations to those who prey on totally unprotected facilities.

Each marina is site specific and its operations, setting and local area differ. But some generalities can be considered.

Some facilities have created a neighborhood watch program for the marina where boaters, like homeowners, keep a careful eye on what is happening around them and report unusual, undesirable and/or suspicious activities. Others have taken to the installation of signage and surveillance cameras and some have gone to even more sophisticated systems including motion and breakage detection on individual boats as well as upland facilities.

One marina I know of in the northeastern US had never had a security system. After a series of nuisance break-ins, a night watchman was hired, but the problems continued, although not as numerous (though the sophistication of the break-ins and individual thefts showed more ingenuity and resulted in more costly incidents). The facility then went to the installation of surveillance cameras with appropriate signage throughout the facility. Almost immediately the break-ins ceased. But the enterprising marina operator was determined to take the initiative and turn the security system into a marketing advantage. Not only did he start to advertise that the facility had 24 hour surveillance cameras – but he went two step further – one camera was hooked up to the internet so that anyone viewing the marina's web site could see the weather conditions at the marina in real time, and another was also hooked up to a customers only portion of the web site to allow patrons to see their boats as the camera scans around the facility. Both approaches ended up becoming excellent marketing advantages for the marina.

In that case it worked.

Truth be told, if someone is determined to break in, prevention approaches may not be totally effective. However, like home alarm systems, and associated signage, the systems act as a deterrent to most potential incidents.

Some have asked whether the security system signage is important. In most situations the signage is as if not more important than the system. Both work as a deterrent to those who suffer from temptation.

Recently I was talking to a boater who had decided to take a one-week cruise on his boat. As an avid sailor and having many days with no cooperating winds, the boat did not make it to its intended harbor until dusk or dark (if at all). In a couple of marinas, when the captain pulled into an empty slip (after not being able to reach anyone at the marina on the radio), no one could be found. At one facility he ran into a couple of employees upland who were less than interested in being helpful, said just take any slip, and left. Had the captain not made a point of wanting to pay for the night's dockage, the facility would have been out of the transient docking fee, would not have known who the visitor was and was losing control of their facility. That's not just bad security, it's bad for business.

Aside from hiring *Pinkertons*, installing cameras, and the like, there are some simple things that one can do that will be good for both your security and business bottom lines.

- Training employees, including (and perhaps especially) seasonal employees, to keep a careful watch on the facility is of paramount importance - not only to know who is coming and going but to provide the necessary service to its customers, maintain good order in the facility, insure that proper and best management practices are being employed, insure that undesirable activities are not taking place and to insure that visitors understand the expectations of the facility.
- Walk the facility daily and see what is going on, who is there, listen to boaters as they discuss the comings and goings of others.
- Create a security plan – with updated EMERGENCY phone numbers and what to do in case of differing problems, ranging from foreign or other transient visitors, to accidents and fires. And make sure that the plan and emergency telephone numbers are posted in easy to get to areas. Many facilities tend to lock them up with everything else. The problem with that is no one can get them or many do not even know where they are – much less when they are needed.

Whatever you do, try to avoid turning your facility into something more resembling a prison than a marina. You want a security blanket, not a straightjacket. It's a delicate balance.

And, in this age of counter-terrorism, do be sure to find out what the authorities require from you and how you can be of help to them. It is a good partnership – take advantage of it. In the US there are specific Homeland Security requirements of marinas that are tailored to the local areas.

Ultimately, improving your facility's security can be a win-win situation for just about everyone - except the bad guys.

And as you think about this article ... Smile you may be on a candid camera.

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