

Coast Guard to assist RCMP during Winter Olympics

Local News

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Top notch athletes throughout the world are in the final stages of training for the 21st Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia. As the world prepares for this fury of sporting spectacle, professionals of another sort are training around-the-clock to provide maritime safety and security throughout the region during the games.

The U.S. Coast Guard will be assisting its Canadian counterparts with security measures for the areas surrounding Vancouver, to include the maritime U.S./Canadian border.

It's a tall order considering the San Juan Island chain on the U.S. side of the border is peppered with more than 170 islands and Canada has its own island chain north of U.S. waters leading into the Vancouver region.

Coast Guard planning for the security of the Winter Olympics, certain to draw millions to the region, has been coordinated between the U.S. and Canada for more than a year and the Coast Guard has been actively training with Canadian personnel since 2007.

Coast Guard Station Bellingham, Wash., the northernmost station in the western portion of the continental U.S., sent 14 members along with officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, in Charleston, S.C., in 2009 for a joint law-enforcement training course.

The two-week course bolstered efficiency between the Coast Guard boarding team members and the RCMP officers, familiarizing both agencies with U.S. and Canadian laws.

"The experience the RCMP brought with them as law enforcement officers was invaluable to Coast Guard personnel; whereas law enforcement is a portion of our job it's their entire job," said Chief Petty Officer Jamie DeSanno, executive petty officer of Station Bellingham. "Being able to learn how they conduct an investigation when they do a routine boarding is interesting compared to our methods."

The training in South Carolina also reversed roles and allowed the Coast Guardsmen to train as RCMP officers establishing them as Super Numerary Special Constables. Additionally the RCMP members familiarized themselves with Coast Guard methods; essentially training them as U.S. customs officers.

The Coast Guard and RCMP cross-trained in both Canadian and U.S. laws in order to establish functional boat crews of both RCMP and Coast Guard personnel. The multi-personnel boat crews create a capability to traverse the U.S./Canadian maritime border during the Olympics.

"Whenever we have an RCMP officer aboard our boat and one of our boarding officers aboard a RCMP boat there is no border, both boats are able to cross back and forth at anytime. The need to clear customs isn't necessary because it has been prearranged before hand," said DeSanno.

This isn't the first time the U.S. and Canada have conducted joint operations. In 2007, the two neighbors tested a similar "Ship Rider Pilot Program" operation for 45 days simultaneously in the Great Lakes and Pacific Northwest.

"The exercise in 2007 was an education on both sides of the border demonstrating we are able to respond to a search and rescue case or a law enforcement case on either the Canadian or

U.S. side of the border," said DeSanno.

In October 2009 Coast Guard boarding team members and RCMP officers conducted a joint training exercise in Canada similar to the joint training held earlier in 2009 in South Carolina. The exercises were designed to further strengthen agency partnerships and improve readiness and interoperability between U.S. and Canadian forces.

Together the U.S. and Canada will once again reaffirm the cooperative nature the two countries have shared for many years prior.

SEATTLE - Crewmembers from the Canadian navy vessel Saskatoon arrive alongside the Coast Guard Cutter Alert during the 2007 Trident Fury exercise near Tofino, B.C., May 14.

Trident Fury is a coalition-based drill bringing Canadian and U.S. forces together to train for potential threats to the national security of both countries.

(Official Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer Shawn D. Eggert)

BELLINGHAM, Wash. - Coast Guard 33-foot Special Purpose Craft-Law Enforcement boat crews simulate a vessel attempting to elude a Coast Guard boarding team in Bellingham Bay, near Lummi Island, Wash., Thursday, Sept. 17, 2009.

Coast Guard Station Bellingham with its proximity to the Canadian border maintains operational proficiency through frequent training exercises similar to this one.

(U.S. Coast Guard photo/Petty Officer 3rd Class Colin White)