



2019

Marine Safety Unit Chicago Year In Review



Commander's Letter

2019 served as a year of change for Marine Safety Unit (MSU) Chicago. After taking command, I have had the opportunity to continue to strengthen the relationships with our federal, state, local, and industry partners. MSU Chicago's dedicated crew takes the honor of serving the nation, public, and our stakeholders very seriously. As leaders in our community, we perform our missions with resolve and professionalism, exemplifying the Coast Guard core values of **Honor**, **Respect**, and **Devotion to Duty**.

The crew of active duty, reserve, civilian, and auxiliary members, will continue to focus on our three watchwords: **LEADERSHIP**, **TEAMWORK**, and **WELLNESS**.



*CDR Randy Preston
Commanding Officer
MSU Chicago*

We all provide **LEADERSHIP**. We lead with a bias for action to perform our missions safely and effectively while treating others with respect. As we grow professionally and personally, our training assures proficiency and success during the execution of our missions, always doing the right thing and demanding the same of others to uphold our core values.

In order to be successful in our resource-constrained environment, we must work together as a team. **TEAMWORK** means working collaboratively with our local, state, and federal partners and maritime stakeholders on our shared goal of the safety, security, and protection of our waterways and all of its users. We will continue to seek out opportunities to work together, realizing that cohesive teams are built on a solid foundation of trust and mutual respect.

To ensure mission success and effectiveness, we must maintain **WELLNESS**. As partners, we all need to take care of ourselves and our families. A healthy work-life balance will enable us all to focus when working together to tackle issues and overcome the challenges we may face. Together, we can make a positive impact on the multi-use waterways that are critical to our livelihoods and the future of the maritime transportation system.

We touch on some of our noteworthy accomplishments in the following pages. Enjoy reading about them and get to know our crew through our work and community involvement. Again, I am honored to work with all of our partners and to serve alongside the MSU Chicago crew.

Sincerely,

Randy L. Preston
Commander, U.S. Coast Guard

Waterways Management & Facilities Division

In 2019, the division's major accomplishments included working closely with industry and governmental partners to manage closures to several of the locks on the Illinois Waterway, responding to significant pollution cases, and coming together with industry partners to form crucial committees to address vital gaps in safety on the water.

In preparation for the extended closure of multiple locks in the summer of 2020, the Waterways Management Division worked hand in hand with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Illinois River Carriers' Association in Fall 2019 to develop and execute an effective "dry run" plan. Together, we were able to identify and resolve potential pitfalls and problems before they can occur during the extended shutdown.

Additionally, our Waterways Branch worked quickly and diligently to organize a meeting of involved parties in the aftermath of a collision between a local high school rowing vessel and a commercial barge. Communicating through the Chicago Harbor Safety Committee (CHSC), participants came together to discuss the importance of safety for all users of the extremely busy Chicago River. The end result has been a newly formed sub-committee within the CHSC whose main purpose is to educate the substantial human powered craft community about following the rules of the road, especially when transiting on navigable waterways.

In August 2019, our Facilities and Response Branch was handed a high visibility case in the form of a cyanide spill originating from a facility that resulted in a significant fish kill and triggered an extensive response that included many of our local and state partners. Our Facilities Inspectors and Pollution Responders spent countless hours reviewing scientific reports to ensure the source of the spill was secured and maintained the watch until the cyanide levels fell to a negligible quantity. Our Pollution branch also responded to multiple sunken recreational vessels throughout the year, working closely with the owners to get them re-floated while ensuring any spilled fuel was removed from the water.

Division Activities

- 61 Safety Activities
- 76 MTSA Exams
- 85 Security Checks
- 8 Security Breaches
- 110 Marine Notices
- 27 Safety Zones
- 58 Marine Permits
- 95 Pollution Responses



What's left of a rowing vessel after colliding with a barge on the Chicago River



Pollution responders oversee a response as boom is placed to contain the fuel leak from a sunken recreational vessel

Inspection Division

MSU Chicago's Inspection Division continued to provide inspection services as the fleet of responsibility grew to 205 vessels, operating in the southern end of Lake Michigan and throughout the Illinois and Indiana river systems. As a bridge between the 8th and 9th Coast Guard Districts, MSU Chicago serves in a key role for the Great Lakes and Western Rivers maritime industry, leading the way in the Ninth District for Subchapter M implementation, issuing 15 initial COIs to towing vessels.

With an eye on passenger vessel safety, MSU Chicago issued five initial COIs to new small passenger vessels, while providing guidance to illegal charter vessel operators to achieve compliance. The Inspection Division also expanded the small passenger vessel Risk-Based Decision Making policy, performing reduced scope inspections on 28 vessels. Through this program, the staff was able to allocate resources to the highest risk operations while giving credit to vessels and operators with sound safety records.

On August 24, 2019, a small passenger vessel carrying 360 passengers experienced a major structural failure of the upper deck during an evening cruise. MSU Chicago inspectors responded to the casualty, working with the Coast Guard Traveling Inspection Staff, the Marine Safety Center, the vessel's naval architect, and the owner/operator to make repairs while ensuring passenger safety. Constant communication among all involved parties helped facilitate the extensive repairs to the aluminum upper deck structure, enabling the vessel to return to operation in time to close out operations during Chicago's short commercial season.

Other highlights included responding to a grounded barge, a sunken towing vessel, and a tank barge explosion.

Inspection Numbers



LT Queary issuing an initial COI to a towing vessel



Mr. Wilkinson evaluating machinery automation safety testing procedures

Investigation Division

The Investigation Division’s marine casualty case load increased 25% in 2019. There were also two Major Marine Casualties, which brought the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) to assist. In addition, the first Suspension and Revocation Hearing was held at the Federal District Court, resulting in the Investigating Officers successfully proving their case. Duty personnel responded to more than 200 marine casualties. The following two casualties showcased the unit’s responsiveness and were “All-hands on Deck” evolutions:

A tank-barge, previously carrying the highly flammable cargo acetone, experienced a massive explosion, causing the total constructive loss of the vessel. The rapid response of the Investigating Officers identified the clear culprit: the pneumatic blowers used to gas-free the cargo tanks were not properly bonded, allowing static electricity to build, ultimately leading to ignition of acetone vapors. As a result of this dramatic explosion, a Safety-Alert was relayed nationwide to impress the importance of ensuring proper bonding of gas-freeing equipment.

A towing vessel pushing multiple barges, allided with a railroad bridge on the Illinois River, causing property damage in excess of \$1M, making it a Major Marine Casualty. Investigating Officers from MSU Chicago and the NTSB identified multiple causal factors and latent unsafe conditions contributing to the incident. The casualty was found to fit a recent pattern of towing vessels alliding with bridges. To address this, Investigating Officers released a Finding of Concern titled “Factors Increasing Risk for Bridge Allisions,” a message to industry, providing detailed steps and guidance to prevent future bridge allisions.

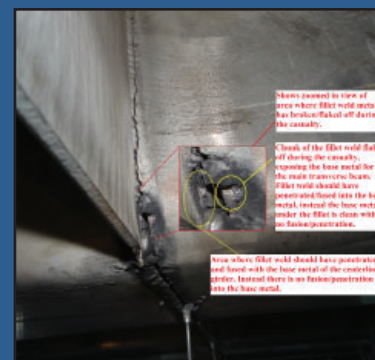
In 2019, MSU Chicago continued extensive outreach efforts to educate operators and the public of the passenger vessel safety laws, and continued enforcement of those intent to violate the law.

Investigation Numbers

- 102 Incident Investigation Activities
- 99 Preliminary Investigation Activities.
- 14 Enforcement Investigation Activities



CWO Lovelace and Pollution Responders attend salvage operations following the capsizing of an Inspected Towing Vessel



Following a Class-1 Structural Failure on a K-boat, Investigators identify and articulate cause of casualty in the final report

Auxiliary Division 37

2019 started with the challenge of the government shutdown, curtailing most Auxiliary activity until the second week of February. However, when the shutdown ended, The Auxiliary picked up in stride, right where they left off. In addition to Division 37's work on the Recreational Boating Safety mission in this very diverse Area of Responsibility, Auxiliarist Katzman from Division 39 dedicated almost one thousand hours of service to MSU Chicago.

The Flotilla also successfully completed many public education and public affairs missions, including joining the active duty members for Chicago's Memorial Day Parade again and introducing Commander Randy Preston to the community at Hinsdale's Independence Day Parade. Flotilla 25 also completed all of the Bridge Verifications for the entire division.

Flotilla 25 started a new campaign on social media for National Safe Boating Week, "Booze and Boats Don't Mix." The campaign was quite successful, with the message to not mix alcohol and recreational boating. It went out to thousands of viewers that would never have been reached by conventional means. The members of the flotilla also continued to augment the active component at MSU Chicago by qualifying as watchstanders. Vice Flotilla Commander Tim Hudson very impressively earned his Facilities Inspector qualification, and Flotilla Commander Craig Felde trained to take over Barge Load Line Exemptions with the retirement of Ms. Beverly Childs in the fall.

The flotilla continued to excel in its missions to the point of garnering several National Awards in 2019, including the National Commodore's Three Star Award for Diversity Management (its fifth such award), the Auxiliary's National Award for Best Publication going to "Ratlines," the flotilla's newsletter, and the USCG National Office of Boating Safety Award as Flotilla of the Year.

With the start of 2020, the Auxiliary will be taking part in the new Auxiliary Sea Scouts program, introducing a new generation to keeping the American public safe on the nation's waterways.



Tim Hudson and Craig Felde accepting the Flotilla of the Year Award for 37-25



Auxiliarist Pat Jenzake serving in the galley of the USCGC MACKINAW



Ken Derrig and Jeff Bedore manning a Public Affairs table at the National Night Out public safety event

Notable Events



The Commandant with LT Queary at the Great Lakes Leadership, Diversity & Inclusion Symposium



Lieutenant Commander Puffer delivering opening remarks at the Bareboat Charter & UPV Workshop



Lieutenant General Fenton with Petty Officer Moreno at the Armed Forces Ball



Commander Merchant with dignitaries at Chicago's celebration of Memorial Day



Promotion of Daniell Lashbrook from Chief Petty Officer to Chief Warrant Officer



Captain Stuhlreyer with Commanders Zeita Merchant & Randy Preston at MSU Chicago's Change of Command



MSU Chicago gathered for a lunch catered by the USO of Illinois



Master Chief Alan Haraf's retirement ceremony at Station Calumet Harbor



Major General Whittle with CDR Preston at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Fish Barrier



CWO Johnson Working on Performance Qualification Standard (PQS) Sign-offs with Auxiliarist Katzman



CDR Preston saluting USCG Vietnam Veteran GM2 Nelson upon his return from Washington DC as part of the Honor Flight Program



Bent frames & the deformed deck of a red flag barge following an explosion