



# COMMANDER ZEITA MERCHANT

## COMMANDING OFFICER

### USCG MARINE SAFETY UNIT CHICAGO



Commander Merchant assumed duties as the Commanding Officer, Marine Safety Unit Chicago on July 8, 2016, after serving two years as Special Assistant to the Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard. As the Commanding Officer of Marine Safety Unit Chicago, she is responsible for executing the Coast Guard's Port Safety and Security, Marine Environmental Protection, and Commercial Vessel Safety missions under the auspices of the Department of Homeland Security on the Southern Lake Michigan shorelines of Illinois and Indiana, as well as the Chicago Area Waterway System and the Illinois River System.

Born in Chicago, Illinois and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, Commander Merchant graduated with honors from Tougaloo College with a Bachelor of Science in Biology and completed Coast Guard Officer Candidate School at New London, Connecticut. Enjoying over 20 years of active duty service, CDR Merchant is a Type-I Incident Commander and a recognized authority in the complex and rapidly changing Marine Safety, Emergency and Environmental Management field.

From 2012-2014, Commander Merchant served as the Executive Officer of Marine Safety Unit Texas City. Her responsibilities there included carrying out the Coast Guard's Maritime Safety and Security and Marine Environmental Protection and Response missions throughout the deepwater ports of Galveston, Freeport and Texas City, Texas. Of particular note during this tour, Commander Merchant served as the Deputy Federal On-Scene Coordinator during the Texas City "Y" Spill response operation, a 168,000-gallon heavy marine fuel oil spill that crippled four major shipping channels in the Nation's largest petro-chemical port complex.

Commander Merchant also served as a Congressional Fellow on two committees in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., from 2010 to 2012. During the 111th Congress, she employed her multifaceted expertise in guiding legislation that governed the Coast Guard and maritime transportation activities on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. At the start of the 112th Congress, she was selected to serve as a Fellow on the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform where she supported the committee's oversight work on fraud, waste and abuse in the federal government.

Commander Merchant also served as Supervisor, Port of Miami Field Office and Chief of Port Operations at U. S. Coast Guard Sector Miami. During this tour of duty, she led Sector Miami operations at three of the largest ports along the Eastern Seaboard. Prior to this tour, she served as an Executive Planner to the Coast Guard Flag and Senior Executive Service members at Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, D.C., and as a Marine Inspector and Port Operations Officer at Marine Safety Office New Orleans, Louisiana.

Commander Merchant was conferred a Master of Quality Systems Management from the National Graduate School in 2003. She also earned a Master of Public Administration in Environmental and Emergency Management from George Washington University in Washington D. C. in June of 2010 and a Doctorate in Business Administration in 2011. In addition, she is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's Executive Education Leadership in Homeland Security Course and a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Seminar XXI National Security and Foreign Affairs Fellow.

CDR Merchant has been honored with numerous professional, academic, and community service awards, including the 2017 USO LTC James M. O'Rourke Service Salute Award, Black Engineer of the Year (BEYA) Professional Achievement in Government Award, BEYA STEM K-12 Promotion of Education Award, the MEAC/SWAC Challenge Legends HBCU Trailblazer Award, and the Coast Guard Award for Excellence in Diversity. Commander Merchant's personal military awards include two Meritorious Service Medals, four Coast Guard Commendation Medals, three Coast Guard Achievement Medals, two Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medals, and four Commandant's Letters of Commendation, Marine Safety Insignia and Commandant's Staff Identification Badge.