

## **Cruise Ship Safety and Security**

During the first quarter of 2004, the U.S. Dept. of Transportation reports that cruise lines carried 2.3 million passengers in North America, up 13.6 percent from the same period last year. Locally, Jacksonville ranked 12<sup>th</sup> for departures for all North American ports, with 15 cruise ship voyages carrying 27,000 passengers. Today, nearly all the ocean cruise lines employ passenger ships registered under flags of various foreign countries. In Jacksonville, passenger ships flying foreign flags made all 15 voyages during this record-breaking quarter. So, when you book your next vacation cruise package, what assurances do you have that the foreign flagged cruise ship is in compliance with the safety and security laws of the United States?

As a condition of permitting a cruise ship to take on passengers in a U.S. port, the U.S. Coast Guard requires the ship to meet the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (referred to as SOLAS). SOLAS and other international regulations require compliance with stringent regulations regarding structural fire protection, firefighting and lifesaving equipment, watertight integrity and stability, vessel control, navigation safety, crewing and crew competency, safety management and environmental protection. Additionally, under SOLAS, compliance with International Ship and Port Facility Security Code became mandatory on July 1, 2004. The objective of this code is to detect/assess security threats and take preventive measures against security incidents affecting ships or port facilities used in international trade, and to have in place plans and procedures to react to security incidents or a change in the port's security level.

To insure compliance with SOLAS, the Coast Guard examines the ship when it first goes into service at a U.S. port, with periodic checks thereafter. The examinations emphasize structural fire safety, proper lifesaving equipment, and the implementation of the procedures contained within the Ship's Security Plan, such as the screening of the ship's supplies, and all persons, baggage and personal effects of persons seeking to board the ship. Fire and abandoned ship drills conducted by the ship's crew are witnessed, and operational tests are made on key equipment such as steering systems, fire pumps, and lifeboats. The Coast Guard has the authority to require correction of any deficiencies before allowing the ship to take on passengers at the U.S. port. The records of these examinations (called Control Verification Examinations) are open to the public and can be accessed online at <http://cgmix.uscg.mil/psix/psix2/>.

Persons who wish to address a safety or security related matter they have observed on a cruise ship calling on the Port of Jacksonville should contact the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office in Jacksonville at (904) 232-2640.