



All Hands Messages

Being a Guardian

To the Men and Women of the Coast Guard:

As we approach the Fourth of July weekend in the midst of a very busy transfer season, I want to share some personal thoughts with you. In the last several months I have had very frank conversations at the end of my All Hands meetings about internalizing our Guardian Ethos so we can protect and respect our shipmates with the same dedication that we display to protect, defend and save the American public. Many of these meetings have included Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Skip Bowen and our Reserve Component Master Chief Petty Officer, Jeff Smith. This All Hands comes from the three of us.

Wherever I travel, I see Coast Guard men and women doing extraordinary things every day. Whether active duty, reservist, civilian, auxiliaryist, or retiree, members of our Coast Guard family fully understand our obligation to serve the citizens of this Nation and ensure we meet our safety, security, and stewardship responsibilities in the maritime domain.

On and off duty, you selflessly put the welfare of others above that of yourself. You are the boarding team member watching the hands of the crew of a go-fast or self-propelled semi-submersible vessel and at the same time watching your teammate's back. You are the marine inspector assessing risk before entering a confined space. You are the air crew managing every situation as a team. You are the cutter and small boat crews conducting internal risk-assessments before executing a mission. You are the thousands in support roles who make these actions possible. Thank you for all that you do to serve our Nation and the public.

Today, I am asking you to consider your role as professional Guardians, whether it be in executing or supporting the mission, in a much broader sense. You are exceptional at viewing your duty to the maritime public through the lens of our Guardian Ethos. Now, I am asking you to turn that lens around and train it on the people you serve with on a daily basis. In the last two years we have saved countless lives, protected the environment, and insured the safety and security of our Nation. But at the same time we have shouldered the heavy burden of external scrutiny, self appraisal and accountability associated with operational MISHAPS, off duty accidents, and insensitive behaviors that demeaned ourselves and our shipmates.

While these incidents may not appear so, they are linked. They represent what may be a blind spot in our rear view mirror, or the contact lost in sea return on the radar, or the threat that is hiding in plain sight, or our own failure to recognize that we should step forward to prevent something bad from happening. It is a loss of situational awareness about our own shipmates. Collectively, these experiences remind us that we must be each other's Guardian. It should not take a command directive to prompt us to remind someone to wear a helmet when riding a motorcycle. We should not sit idly by when a shipmate announces he or she is driving 24 hours straight to see their family or fiancée. Just as you would not disregard briefings and required checklists before executing operations, you must intervene before shipmates put themselves at risk on watch or on liberty. Likewise, we must respect the strength our Service gains from the diversity of our workforce. We should not treat our fellow Guardians any differently than we would treat those we are trying to rescue or save. We cannot afford the loss or injury of one single person. The effect on families and friends is devastating and everlasting. The effect on the Coast Guard erodes our capability, competency, and capacity to serve the Nation. We need each and every one of you. We must be Guardians of one another on and off duty.

You will see a number of ALCOASTs in the future that will focus and expand on some of the issues and specific problems and challenges I have noted. Please read them, internalize them and discuss them to make sure your shipmates understand your responsibilities to one another as well. In addition to living the Coast Guard core values of honor, respect and devotion to duty, I am asking you to include devotion to each other. That is being a Guardian.

As we celebrate our Nation's 232nd birthday, whether on duty or off, keep a weather eye toward your shipmates as you serve the public and your fellow Guardians.

Admiral Thad Allen

