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FM COMDT COGARD WASHINGTON DC//G-RCB//
TO: AIG 4980

BT

UNCLAS //NI6114//

SUBJ: USE OF SEAT BELTS AND/OR HELMETS WHILE OPERATING DEFENDER CLASS BOATS

A. TEAM COORDINATION TRAINING, COMDTINST 1541.1 (SERIES)
B. OPERATIONAL RISK MANAGEMENT, COMDTINST 3500.3 (SERIES)

1. PURPOSE: THE PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE IS TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE REGARDING THE WEARING OF INSTALLED SEAT BELTS AND/OR HELMETS WHILE OPERATING DEFENDER CLASS BOATS.

2. BACKGROUND:

A. RECENT MISHAPS INVOLVING DEFENDER CLASS BOATS HAS PROMPTED THE OFFICE OF BOAT FORCES TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK REGARDING ESTABLISHING A CG-WIDE POLICY CONCERNING THE WEARING OF INSTALLED SEAT BELTS AND/OR HELMETS ON BOARD DEFENDER CLASS BOATS. SOME BELIEVE THAT THE WEARING OF SEAT BELTS AND/OR HELMETS COULD HAVE PREVENTED THE PERSONAL INJURIES SUFFERED BY THE CREW AND A CG-WIDE POLICY SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED. OTHERS BELIEVE THAT DUE TO THE VARYING MISSION TYPES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS WHICH WE OPERATE OUR BOATS, A CG-WIDE POLICY COULD NOT ADEQUATELY ADDRESS EACH POSSIBLE SCENARIO.

B. THROUGH OUR DELIBERATIONS AND FACT FINDING, IT HAS BEEN DETERMINED THAT A SEAT BELT AND/OR HELMET POLICY BASED ON SPECIFIC OPERATING PARAMETERS SUCH AS BOAT SPEED, MISSION, WEATHER CONDITIONS, AND TIME OF DAY COULD NOT BE ADEQUATELY ARTICULATED. IT HAS ALSO BEEN DETERMINED THAT HAVING CREW MEMBERS WEAR THEIR SEAT BELTS AND/OR HELMETS AT ALL TIMES WHILE UNDERWAY WAS TOO RESTRICTIVE A POLICY AND NOT PRACTICAL. ADDITIONALLY, MANY COMMANDING OFFICERS AND OFFICERS IN CHARGE HAVE ALREADY IMPLEMENTED EFFECTIVE UNIT POLICIES. SINCE DEFENDER CLASS BOATS CARRY OUT A WIDE ARRAY OF MISSIONS IN AN EVER CHANGING ENVIRONMENT, THE OFFICE OF BOAT FORCES FEELS THE DECISION OF WHEN TO WEAR SEAT BELTS AND/OR HELMETS SHOULD REMAIN AT THE UNIT LEVEL.

3. ACTION:

A. COMMANDING OFFICERS AND OFFICERS IN CHARGE SHALL ROUTINELY DISCUSS SEAT BELT AND/OR HELMET USE WITH THEIR CREWS AND ESTABLISH UNIT POLICY.

B. SECTOR READY FOR OPS TEAMS SHALL ENSURE UNITS HAVE ADEQUATE SEAT BELT AND HELMET POLICIES IN PLACE.

C. PRIOR TO GETTING UNDERWAY, AS WELL AS THROUGHOUT THE MISSION, BOAT CREWS SHALL CONTINUOUSLY ASSESS AND MANAGE RISKS IAW REFS A AND B. DURING THESE ASSESSMENTS THE CREW SHOULD CONSIDER WHETHER OR NOT SEAT BELTS AND/OR HELMETS SHOULD BE WORN. FACTORS FOR THE CREW TO CONSIDER ARE SEA STATE, TIME OF DAY, MISSION, ANTICIPATED BOAT SPEED AND MANEUVERING. AS ALWAYS, THE COXSWAIN IS ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE SAFETY OF THE CREW AND THE BOAT, AS WELL AS THE MISSION. ADHERENCE TO UNIT SEAT BELT AND/OR HELMET POLICIES AND SAFE BOAT OPERATIONS ARE EXPECTED AT ALL TIMES.

4. NO SINGLE PIECE OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) WILL COMPLETELY ELIMINATE THE RISK OF PERSONAL INJURY THAT CAN RESULT WHEN OPERATING A BOAT IRRESPONSIBLY. A COMBINATION OF PPE AND PRUDENT, RESPONSIBLE BOAT HANDLING IS REQUIRED TO PREVENT INJURY. SEAT BELTS, HELMETS, AND OTHER PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT WORK ONLY TO REDUCE INJURY. THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT INJURIES IS TO OPERATE THE BOAT RESPONSIBLY AND FOLLOW THE OPERATIONAL RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS.

5. POCS:

A. DEFENDER CLASS POLICY AND TRAINING - CWO: [REDACTED] COMDT
(G-RCB-1) AT ([REDACTED]) OR MR. [REDACTED] COMDT (G-RCB-1) AT
[REDACTED] AND,

B. DEFENDER CLASS PLATFORM MANAGEMENT - LT [REDACTED] COMDT
(G-RCB-2) AT [REDACTED]

6. INTERNET RELEASE IS AUTHORIZED.

7. CAPT SCOTT W. ROBERT, CHIEF, OFFICE OF BOAT FORCES, SENDS.

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