



ALERT 11

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A NEW YEAR

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Cover Photograph: Bellingham, Wash – Flotilla 11 Change of Watch Ceremony. US Coast Guard photo.

Commander's Comments



Ahoy Shipmates,

Here is your Flotilla update for the Spring Edition. We will continue to hold hybrid Flotilla meetings on the third Thursday of each month. If you are able to attend in person, please join us at

Station Bellingham (28 Bellwether Way). You may also attend via Zoom; the link will be emailed to you the week of the meeting. As I am new in command, I would love to put faces to names.

Our Flotilla activities are picking up. Some notable upcoming events include:

- ✱ May 2: Opening Day, Squalicum Harbor
- ✱ May 3: Fishermen's Memorial, Blaine
- ✱ May 11–14: Boat America classes (via Zoom)
- ✱ May 18–24: National Safe Boating Week
- ✱ May 21: F11 meeting (CG Station/Zoom)
- ✱ May 25: Ski to Sea Race safety patrol
- ✱ June 7: Birch Bay Village VSCs

On the membership front, we have welcomed new members. Monica and Bret joined recently and have already jumped in—qualifying in several areas. We also welcomed our newest member this week: Kat. Please be sure to introduce yourselves and help our newest shipmates feel at home. We're glad you're here and look forward to volunteering alongside you.

In July, we will host a get-together to thank the members who are planning to retire from the Auxiliary. This Flotilla would not have been successful without your service. Please watch for more details later this summer.

For required training, please review Pam's notes on the available courses. Please note that Bloodborne Pathogens training is required for boat crew members. If you have lapsed in some or all of your qualifications, Pam can help you get back on track. We are a geographically spread-out group, and we want to make completing required training as easy as possible.

As FC, I will continue to conduct uniform inspections for active members. There are two ways to fulfill this requirement: (1) in person at a Flotilla meeting, or (2) by emailing me a head-to-toe photo of you in uniform.

Regarding uniforms at events, we are still being asked not to wear our uniforms out and about. Please change at the event you are attending.

Our boating crew will be busy this year. First, we will be covering Ski to Sea as a rescue and safety boat. We are also being asked to provide safety support at Bellingham watch parties for FIFA World Cup games, alongside our normal patrols and training. If you would like to become boat crew, regain your qualifications, or continue progressing as boat crew, there will be opportunities this summer—please reach out to us. PPE has been entered into AuxData II. If you still have issued gear and do not plan to participate in the program, please return it to Pam as soon as possible.

This year looks to be an active one, so please check the newsletter and website calendar to stay apprised of upcoming activities. Consider which events best align with your reasons for joining the Auxiliary, and I hope you'll continue to invest your time and talent in our mission. Your participation keeps our Flotilla strong and viable. The time I've spent in the Auxiliary has made me a better boater—and you never know when your influence could help someone stay safe on the water.

Leslie Parks, Flotilla Commander

Flotilla Calendar

May

- 2 Opening Day, Squalicum Harbor
- 3 Fishermen's Memorial, Blaine
- 11-14 Boat America classes
- 18-24 National Safe Boating Week
- 21 F11 meeting (CG Station/Zoom)
- 25 Ski to Sea Race Safety Patrol

June

- 7 Birch Bay Village VSCs

Please note that some dates are tentative. Please double check closer to the time of the event to confirm.

ACRONYMS

B'ham	Bellingham
CoC	Change of command event
CoW	Change of watch
DTRAIN	Districtwide training event
FL11	Flotilla 11
?	Placeholder when the exact date is not yet known
PPE	Personal protective equipment
QE	Qualification exam
RSSO	Rescue and survival systems officer
TBD	To be determined
VSC	Vessel safety check

Flotilla 13-01-01: 2025 Year in Review

A look at the activity, training, and recognition that defined our Flotilla's 2025 calendar year, drawn from AUXDATA II reporting on member activity logs, completed tasks, and awards issued.

The Headline Numbers

Twenty-two of the flotilla's thirty nine members logged measurable activity during 2025, contributing 3,658 hours across 23 mission categories and completing 159 training tasks spanning 36 distinct courses and workshops. Twelve awards were issued to eleven members, recognizing service across the full breadth of the flotilla's mission set — from operations to public education to vessel examination.

That participation rate is a familiar pattern for any flotilla leader who has stared at AUXDATA's member list. The active core is small and dedicated. The data below tells that story in more detail.

Activity Hours

Hours logged in 2025 leaned heavily toward leadership and chaplain support, which together accounted for nearly two-thirds of all reported time. Operational missions — vessel safety checks, RBS visitor outreach, and Boat America instruction — registered the highest entry counts, reflecting the steady cadence of public-facing work even where individual entries were short.

Hours by Mission Category

Mission Code	Hours	Entries	% of Total
99A: Leadership Activities	1,174.50	32	32.1%
97A: Auxiliary Chaplain Support	1,151.00	55	31.5%
99E: Other Admin/Log Support	390.00	24	10.7%
99D: Training Support	314.00	58	8.6%
22A: Ops Training (Quals)	124.00	26	3.4%
91A: Vessel Safety Check	104.50	39	2.9%

Mission Code	Hours	Entries	% of Total
11: RBS Visitor Missions	85.00	35	2.3%
99B: RBS Support	84.00	17	2.3%
14A: Boat America	64.00	55	1.7%
01D: Non-SAR Standby	31.75	56	0.9%
06B: Other Member Training	27.50	8	0.8%
31: Private Nav Systems	25.20	11	0.7%
34: ATON Program Training	24.00	13	0.7%
20B: Radio Watchstander	18.00	2	0.5%
02: Regatta Safety Zone Support	12.00	2	0.3%
10J: COMREL	10.00	5	0.3%
41: Fed Gov Support	5.00	2	0.1%
14F: Youth Courses	4.00	4	0.1%
91H: Paddlecraft Inspection	3.00	3	0.1%
32: Bridge Nav Systems	2.50	1	0.1%
10G: PA Training	2.00	1	0.1%
06A: Operational Training	1.00	1	0.0%
91B: Facility Inspection	1.00	1	0.0%
Total	3,657.90	451	100.0%

Hours by Member

The 22 members below logged hours during 2025, listed alphabetically.

Member	Hours	Entries
Lucius Andrew	5.50	2
Milan Banjanin	6.50	3
Steven Bell	269.00	27
Peter Border	120.70	66
Pamela Chelgren-Koterba	1,162.00	73
Joie Cosby	5.00	2
Fred Eldred	3.50	1
Emmanuel Eusebio	144.95	44
Gary Farrow	10.00	1

Member	Hours	Entries
Jeffrey Halbrook	20.90	10
Hoyt Hatfield	30.00	7
Michael Hayner	5.00	2
Monica Jackson	2.00	1
Sean Jones	3.50	1
Nico Lacchini	59.95	22
Leslie Parks	46.95	25
John Salinas	27.20	12
Lyle Schrag	1,653.00	108
Jeffrey Schutzler	6.70	4
Jeffrey Shaw	52.20	20
Deborah Sowash	3.50	1
Raymond White	20.00	19

Training and Task Completions

Twenty-two members completed 159 tasks across 36 task types in 2025. Mandatory annual training drove most of the volume — the six required awareness courses (Suicide Prevention, Sexual Harassment

Prevention, Civil Rights, Privacy, Security, and SAPRR) alone accounted for 86 completions, more than half of the year's task activity.

Completions by Task Type

Task Type	Completions
Suicide Prevention (100643)	17
Sexual Harassment Prevention Course (810000)	16
Civil Rights Awareness (502319)	14
Privacy Awareness (810015)	13
Security Education and Training Awareness (810030)	13
Sexual Assault Prevention Response and Recovery (502379)	13
Annual Risk Mgmt TCT Refresher Training	12
Operations Workshop	10
Vessel Examinations Workshop	4
(BCM) Annual Day Tasks	3
Flotilla Leadership Course	3
Introduction to Risk Management LMS Course (100202)	3

Task Type	Completions
ATON/A/V Workshop	2
BQC Core Values & Missions	2
BQC Courtesy and Protocols	2
BQC Human Resources & Awards	2
BQC Membership Requirements & Structure	2
BQC Member Training & Uniforms	2
BQC Regulations & Policies	2
BQC Support and Materials & Reimbursement	2
Ethics Training (502306)	2
ICS100 - Introduction to ICS Online	2
ICS700 Intro to National Incident Management System	2
Patrols Specialty (AUXPAT) Course	2
Seamanship Specialty (AUXSEA) Course	2
Weather Specialty (AUXWEA) Course	2
(COX) Annual Day Tasks	1
Administrative Procedures (AUXAPC) Course	1
Communications Specialty (AUXCOM) Course	1
Communications Workshop	1
Fingerprint Technician Exam	1
ICS210 - Initial Incident Commander	1
Instructor Workshop	1
Introduction to Marine Safety and Environmental Protection	1
QE Approval Crew	1
RBS Program Visitor Workshop (WK-16)	1

Recognition: 2025 Awards

Twelve awards were issued to eleven members in 2025. Each is described below with its eligibility criteria and this year's recipients from Flotilla 13-01-01.

Auxiliary Examiner Program Ribbon



Recognizes Auxiliarists who have qualified as a Vessel Examiner (VE), Recreational Boating Safety Visitor (RBSV), or Commercial Fishing Vessel Examiner (CFVE). The ribbon represents both the qualification itself and ongoing service in the recreational boating safety mission.

Recipients: Gary Farrow, Jeffrey Shaw

Auxiliary Membership Service Award



Presented to members who have completed five cumulative years of Auxiliary membership. Subsequent five-year milestones (10, 15, 20 years) are marked by the addition of bronze stars to the ribbon, with a silver star replacing five bronze. The award recognizes the institutional knowledge and steady contribution that long-tenured members bring to their flotillas.

Recipients: Jeffrey Halbrook, Nico Lacchini, John Salinas, Jeffrey Shaw, Raymond Ulrich

Auxiliary Operations Service Award



Awarded for sustained service in operational missions — boat crew, coxswain, communications watchstander, aviation, and related qualifications — over a multi-year period. This award honors the operational backbone of the Auxiliary, those who put in the hours on the water and on the radio that the Coast Guard depends on.

Recipient: Lyle Schrag

Auxiliary Public Education Service Award



Recognizes Auxiliarists who serve as instructors or instructor's aides, completing thirty or more hours of instruction in Public Education or Member Training, or sixty or more hours as an instructor's aide, or a combined equivalent. This award reflects the flotilla's commitment to teaching boating safety to the public and to the next generation of Auxiliarists.

Recipient: Pamela Chelgren-Koterba

Auxiliary VE/MDV Service Award



Awarded for sustained service in vessel examinations and marine dealer visits, typically requiring sixty or more vessel examinations and a documented record of program visits. This is hands-on safety work — checking

that recreational boats meet federal carriage requirements and that marine retailers have current safety information for their customers.

Recipient: Peter Border

AUXOP Device



The Operational Auxiliarist (AUXOP) device is awarded upon completion of the advanced specialty training program — seven credits across required core courses, a leadership course, and elective courses, each requiring a proctored exam with a 75% passing grade. Often called the "PhD of the Auxiliary," the AUXOP designation marks a member's commitment to mastering the full breadth of Auxiliary operational knowledge.

Recipient: Emmanuel Eusebio

Coast Guard Meritorious Team Commendation



Awarded to Auxiliarists who made a significant contribution to a group or team — distinct from a Coast Guard unit — whose collective work resulted in outstanding accomplishment of a study, project, or process. As a Coast Guard award rather than an Auxiliary-specific one, the Meritorious Team Commendation reflects recognition extending beyond the Auxiliary's own awards structure.

Recipient: Michael Hayner

Looking Ahead

The 2025 numbers tell a story of a small, committed group sustaining a broad mission set. The challenge for 2026 will be growing that active core.

Source data: AUXDATA II reports, Flotilla 13-01-01, calendar year 2025.

Change Of Watch

Flotilla 11 gathered in the Station Bellingham training room on January 17 for our annual Change of Watch, marking the transition from the 2025 to 2026 year. After dessert and a social hour, outgoing Flotilla Commander Pam Chelgren-Koterba reflected on a strong 2025 — recognizing the year's staff officers, presenting member certificates and awards, and naming this year's Bill Daniels awardee. Leslie Parks was installed as Flotilla Commander for 2026, with Pam Chelgren-Koterba stepping into the Vice Flotilla Commander role, followed

by the burgee lowering and raising and the installation of the 2026 staff officer slate.

Keynote remarks came from Lt. Terrell Sisk representing our active-duty partners at Station Bellingham, USCGC *Sea Lion*, and USCGC *Terrapin*, alongside District 13 Commodore Klaas Nijhuis. The afternoon was a fitting close to 2025 and a strong start to the year ahead — and a reminder of how much the flotilla's work depends on the partnerships and friendships we share with our active-duty Coast Guard neighbors.





Bellingham Wash – Flotilla 11's Change of Watch Ceremony, January 17th 2026. US Coast Guard Photos.

Member Training

Congrats to Bret & Monica on their qualifications for Vessel Examiner and Program Visitor respectively!!

Year-to-date, our members have completed 13 training activities: TCT Refreshers, Operation Workshop, Blood-Borne Pathogens, VE, PV, IT, AV Workshops and qualification courses.

- ✳ **TCT Refresher:** Peter, Jeff Shaw, Lyle, Pam, John Salinas, Jeff Halbrook, Nico, Manny, Leslie, Bret
- ✳ **Ops Workshop:** Jeff Shaw, Lyle, Pam, Nico, Manny, Leslie, Bret

Navigation Systems

Notified Flotilla AVs that the 2026 Assignments (PATONs and Bridges) are available to be conducted.

- ✳ **Blood-borne Pathogens:** Jeff Shaw, Lyle, Nico, Manny, Leslie, Joie, Bret
- ✳ **VE Workshop:** Steve Bell, Peter, Lyle, John Salinas, Jeff Halbrook, Nico, Bret
- ✳ **VE Qual Course:** Bret
- ✳ **PV Workshop:** Peter, John Salinas,
- ✳ **PV Qual Course:** Monica,
- ✳ **Instructor Workshop:** Peter, Nico,
- ✳ **Aid Verifier (8 hour) Workshop:** Pam (conducted), Bret
- ✳ **Core Trainings (6):** Steve Chock

One member completed an AV Workshop, then was signed-off on his AV-PQS/Ashore elements.

A History of Coast Guard Helicopter Aviation

From the Flying Banana to the Jayhawk — Eighty Years of Coast Guard Rotary-Wing Aviation

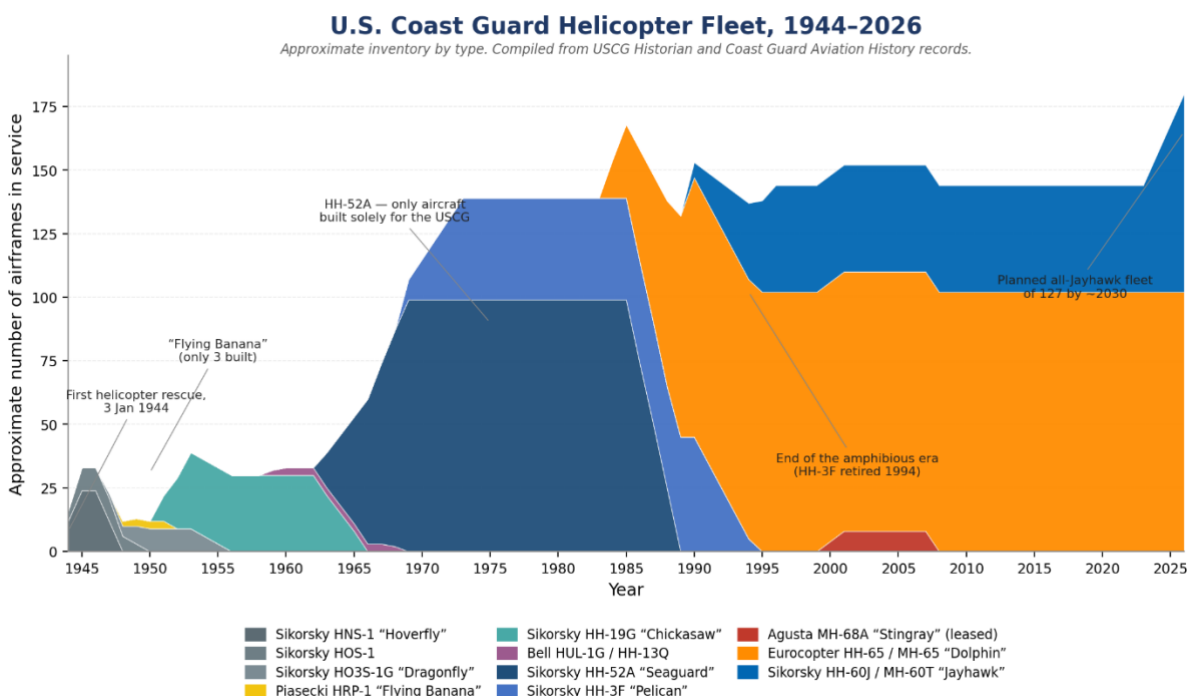
When most people picture a Coast Guard helicopter today, they picture an orange-and-white MH-65 Dolphin or an MH-60 Jayhawk. What is less well known is how early the Coast Guard saw what helicopters could do at sea. While the Coast Guard did not invent the helicopter — Igor Sikorsky did that, and the German Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine actually fielded the first operational military helicopters during the Second World War — the Coast Guard was the first U.S. service to commit to rotary-wing aviation as a core mission, designed the first hydraulic rescue hoist, and ran the school that trained nearly all of America’s first military helicopter pilots.

This is a brief tour of every type of helicopter the Coast Guard has flown, starting with the Sikorsky that first carried blood plasma to a stricken destroyer in 1944, and ending with the MH-60T Jayhawk that will soon be the entire Coast Guard rotary-wing fleet.

Eighty Years of the Fleet at a Glance

The chart below shows the approximate number of Coast Guard helicopters in service by type, year by year, since the first three Sikorsky HNS-1s arrived in 1943. A few patterns jump out: the experimental fleet of the 1940s and early 1950s was tiny — often fewer than 30

airframes total — and it was the arrival of the HH-52A Seaguard in 1963 that made rotary-wing aviation the backbone of the service. The handoff to the modern Dolphin-and-Jayhawk fleet happened over roughly a decade, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. And at the far right of the chart, the planned transition to an all-MH-60T fleet of 127 aircraft by the end of this decade will be the largest Coast Guard helicopter fleet ever flown.



U.S. Coast Guard helicopter fleet composition, 1944–2026. Approximate inventory by type, compiled from USCG Historian and Coast Guard Aviation History records.

The Coast Guard Embraces the Helicopter

In 1942, the U.S. Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics had little interest in helicopters. The Army Air Forces had ordered Sikorsky's new R-4 and were beginning trials of their own. Commander William J. Kossler, a Coast Guard aviation engineering officer, sat on the inter-agency board overseeing rotary-wing development and saw what nobody in the Navy seemed to: a hovering aircraft that could land on a pitching deck or pluck a man from the water was a near-perfect Coast Guard tool.

Kossler convinced his superiors. By July 1942, with U-boats sinking American merchant ships at a catastrophic rate, ADM Ernest J. King assigned the Coast Guard responsibility for developing a sea-going helicopter — a remarkable vote of confidence in the smallest of the armed services. CDR Frank Erickson became Coast Guard Helicopter Aviator #1 and the service's tireless evangelist for the new machine. The Navy Helicopter School, run by the Coast Guard at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, opened in 1943 and trained 97 of America's first military helicopter pilots before it closed in 1945 — 71 of them Coast Guardsmen, the rest from the Navy, Army, British forces, and civilian agencies.

On January 3, 1944, Erickson flew two cases of blood plasma lashed to the floats of his Sikorsky HNS-1 from New York to Sandy Hook, where the destroyer USS Turner had just suffered a catastrophic explosion. Bad weather had grounded everything else. It was the first helicopter mercy flight — a delivery mission, not a survivor pickup. Two weeks later, on 16 January 1944, CDR Stuart Graham (helicopter aviator #2) flew a Sikorsky YR-4B from the deck of the British freighter SS Daghestan underway in the open Atlantic — the first helicopter takeoff and landing from a ship at sea.

The first true helicopter rescue came three months later and was an Army mission, not a Coast Guard one. On April 22-26, 1944, US Army Air Forces Lt. Carter Harman of the 1st Air Commando Group used a YR-4B — the same Sikorsky design the Coast Guard was flying as the HNS-1 — to extract a downed L-1 pilot and three wounded British soldiers from the Burma jungle, ferrying them out one at a time. Harman received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Operationally, the Germans had been there even earlier: the Luftwaffe's Transportstaffel 40, equipped with Flettner Fl 282 Kolibris and Focke-Achgelis Fa 223 Drachen, was the world's first operational helicopter squadron.

What the Coast Guard contributed was different and important. Erickson designed the first hydraulic rescue hoist. Coast Guard pilots developed techniques for shipboard helicopter operations and pioneered the use of the helicopter as a dedicated maritime rescue tool. In 1951, President Truman presented the Collier Trophy — aviation's highest honor — jointly to the Coast Guard, the Department of Defense, and the helicopter industry, citing "outstanding development and use of rotary-winged aircraft for air rescue operations."



Brooklyn, NY — CDR Frank Erickson, Coast Guard helicopter aviator #1, with the Sikorsky HNS-1. US Coast Guard photo.

Sikorsky HNS-1 (1943–1948)

The HNS-1 was the Navy designation for Sikorsky's R-4, the world's first production helicopter. The Coast Guard received its first three in 1943 for evaluation and training at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn. With a 180-horsepower engine, fabric-covered fuselage, and a top speed of about 75 mph, it was barely an aircraft by modern standards. But it could hover, and that changed everything. Erickson and his small cadre used HNS-1s to develop the basic techniques of helicopter rescue, including the first hydraulic rescue hoist — designed by Erickson himself.

Sikorsky HOS-1 (1944–1950)

The development of the experimental XR-6, the HOS-1 was a slightly larger and more capable training helicopter. The Coast Guard used it primarily for pilot training and continued experimentation with shipboard operations. About a dozen served in the program before being retired in favor of more capable types.

Sikorsky HO2S-1 and HO3S-1 (1946–1953)

The HO3S-1 (the Sikorsky S-51) was the Coast Guard's first truly operational rescue helicopter, larger and more capable than the wartime HNS. On April 6, 1949, an HO3S-1 made the longest unescorted helicopter ferry flight on record up to that time, traveling 3,750 miles from Elizabeth City, North Carolina, to Port Angeles, Washington — 57.6 hours of flight time over ten and a half days. Air Station Port Angeles, just across the Strait from Bellingham, has been a Coast Guard rotary-wing post ever since.

Piasecki HRP-1 Rescuer — the “Flying Banana” (1948–1952)

If any Coast Guard helicopter deserves its nickname, it is the HRP-1. Three were delivered beginning in November 1948 at a then-eye-watering cost of \$256,912 each. The HRP-1 was the world's first tandem twin-rotor transport helicopter — two large rotors, one fore and one aft, both spinning above a fabric-covered fuselage that bowed upward in the middle to keep the rotor disks from striking each other. The result looked exactly like a banana, and the crews who flew it called it nothing else.

The Banana was popular and great fun to fly, but it was badly underpowered. A single Pratt & Whitney R-1340 radial engine of 600 horsepower had to drive both 41-foot rotors, and on a hot day with a load aboard the aircraft struggled. The Coast Guard retired its three Bananas after only a few years of service. The HRP-1's real legacy is its layout: every tandem-rotor helicopter that followed, including the Piasecki H-21 Workhorse and ultimately the Boeing CH-47 Chinook, traces its lineage to the Flying Banana.



Elizabeth City, NC – The Piasecki HRP-1 “Flying Banana” was the world's first tandem twin-rotor helicopter. US Coast Guard photo.

Sikorsky HO4S-2G / HO4S-3G — HH-19G “Chickasaw” (1951–1966)

The HO4S was the Sikorsky S-55 — the first helicopter with the engine mounted in the nose driving a shaft up through the cockpit to the rotor head, which freed up a large cabin under the rotor for cargo or passengers. It carried a pilot and copilot up top, with seating for up to 10 people or seven stretchers below. Renamed the HH-19G when the joint designation system was adopted in 1962, the Chickasaw flew for the Coast Guard for over a decade, primarily in the search-and-rescue role from coastal air stations.

Bell HUL-1G / HH-13Q (1959–1969)

A small handful of Bell HUL-1Gs (the military designation for the Bell 47J Ranger, a passenger version of the famous bubble-canopy Bell 47) served the Coast Guard for shipboard operations aboard icebreakers. They were redesignated HH-13Q in 1962. The HUL was the smallest helicopter the Coast Guard has ever operated and remains a footnote in the fleet's history, but it pioneered routine use of helicopters from cutter flight decks.

Sikorsky HH-52A Seaguard (1963–1989)

The HH-52A is, by one historian's count, the only aircraft ever manufactured solely for the Coast Guard. Sikorsky funded a “fly before you buy” demonstration program to convince the service, and the resulting helicopter was tailored exactly to Coast Guard needs. It was the first helicopter with a flying-boat hull — it could land on the water, taxi, and take off again, an enormous capability for ocean rescue. It introduced the now-standard rescue swimmer platform on the right sponson and pioneered automatic flight control modes that allowed precise hovering at night and in poor visibility.

The Seaguard was beloved by its crews. Ninety-nine were built between 1963 and 1969 and they served the Coast

Guard for more than 25 years, retiring in 1989 with an extraordinary record of lives saved — over 15,000 by some estimates. On December 10, 1981, an HH-52A landed aboard CGC Dependable for the 5,000th helicopter landing on her flight deck, the most ever recorded aboard any cutter.



Stratford, CT – The Sikorsky HH-52A Seaguard, the first helicopter with a flying-boat hull. US Coast Guard photo.

Sikorsky HH-3F Pelican (1968–1994)

The HH-3F was a Coast Guard-specific version of the Air Force's CH-3 (itself the famous "Jolly Green Giant" of Vietnam). Like the Seaguard before it, the Pelican had a true flying-boat hull and could land on the water — but it was much larger, with two turbine engines, a rear loading ramp, longer range, all-weather capability, and the radar and electronics needed for serious offshore search and rescue. Forty were procured, and they became the workhorse of long-range Coast Guard rescue for a quarter century.

The Pelican retired on May 6, 1994. With its retirement, the Coast Guard lost something it had possessed continuously since the HH-52A first flew: the ability to land its helicopters on the water. No Coast Guard rotary-wing aircraft has had that capability since. As one writer put it, the Pelican's retirement ended "the Coast Guard's amphibious era."



Cape Cod, MA – An HH-3F Pelican on patrol. With its 1994 retirement, the Coast Guard's amphibious era ended. US Coast Guard photo.

Sikorsky CH-3E Sea King

A small number of CH-3E Sea Kings were briefly operated by the Coast Guard alongside the HH-3F to bridge the gap into the Jayhawk era. These were essentially the Air Force version of the same airframe family and served only briefly before being replaced.

Aérospatiale HH-65 / MH-65 Dolphin (1984–present)

The HH-65 — based on the French Aérospatiale SA 365 Dauphin — was selected in the early 1980s as the Coast Guard's new short-range recovery helicopter, replacing the HH-52A. The choice of a French design was politically controversial at the time, but the Dolphin proved itself quickly. It was the first Coast Guard helicopter with a fenestron (a ducted tail rotor enclosed in the vertical fin) instead of a conventional tail rotor — quieter, safer for ground crews, and instantly recognizable.

Originally designated HH-65A, the fleet has been progressively upgraded through HH-65B and HH-65C variants and now flies as the MH-65E with modern glass cockpits and digital avionics. On August 22, 1994, an HH-65A from Aviation Training Center Mobile became the first U.S. helicopter to reach the North Pole, deployed aboard the icebreaker Polar Sea.



Aviation Training Center Mobile – An MH-65 Dolphin, recognizable by its enclosed fenestron tail rotor. US Coast Guard photo.

Sikorsky HH-60J / MH-60T Jayhawk (1990–present)

The HH-60J Jayhawk was developed in the late 1980s as the Coast Guard’s medium-range recovery helicopter, replacing the HH-3F Pelican. Based on the Navy’s SH-60 Seahawk, it is faster, lighter, and far more capable electronically than its predecessor. Forty-two were delivered between 1990 and 1996. Beginning in 2007, the fleet was rebuilt as the MH-60T with new avionics, sensors, and weapons mounts.

In 2023, the Coast Guard received approval to transition to an all-MH-60T helicopter fleet, eventually replacing the HH-65 as well, and to grow the fleet to 127 aircraft. By the end of this decade, every Coast Guard helicopter in the air will likely be a Jayhawk.

In 2016, several Jayhawks were repainted in a striking yellow scheme to celebrate the centennial of Coast Guard aviation. The yellow paint was a nod to the bright training colors worn by Coast Guard helicopters in the 1940s and 1950s — Frank Erickson’s HNS-1 had been painted exactly the same shade. The first centennial-livery Jayhawk was delivered to Air Station Astoria, Oregon, on January 15, 2016.

Air Station Port Angeles

The closest USCG air station to Bellingham — across the Strait of Juan de Fuca on Ediz Hook, Port Angeles.

Established: June 1, 1935 — The first permanent Coast Guard air station on the Pacific Coast and today the oldest continuously operating air station in the Coast Guard.

Aircraft: Three MH-65E Dolphin helicopters. The Echo upgrade brought a digital glass cockpit, new flight control system, and modern weather radar; Air Station Port Angeles received some of the first MH-65Es delivered to the fleet, in early 2021.

Area of Responsibility: The full Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the Washington outer coast, and inland as far as the Olympic Mountains. Their MH-65s respond as far north as Vancouver, British Columbia, often partnering with Canadian agencies. Anything over the water is theirs; anything over land they assist with.

Missions: Search and rescue, maritime law enforcement, drug interdiction, fisheries patrol, marine environmental protection, homeland security, and logistical support to Sector Puget Sound boat stations including Bellingham, Neah Bay, Port Angeles, and Quillayute River.

Typical Year: Approximately 150 SAR and law enforcement cases, saving roughly 20 lives and assisting 40 persons in distress.

Notable Specialty: Mountain rescue. The Olympics are right next door, and Air Station Port Angeles has flown some of the highest-altitude HH-65 rescues on record — including a 6,900-foot hoist of an injured hiker from the summit of Brothers Mountain in 2007.

Predecessors at the same hangar: Douglas RD-4 Dolphin amphibian (1935), Grumman JF-2 Duck, Grumman JRF Goose, Grumman J4F Widgeon, Sikorsky HO3S-1G (1946), Sikorsky HO4S “Eggbeater” (1951), Grumman HU-16E Albatross (the “Goat,” last fixed-wing aircraft, retired 1973), and the Sikorsky HH-52A Seaguard (1965-1988) before today’s Dolphins arrived.



Astoria, OR – An MH-60T Jayhawk in the special yellow livery commemorating 100 years of Coast Guard aviation. US Coast Guard photo.

Agusta MH-68A “Stingray” — the Italian Mako (2000–2008)

In the late 1990s, the Coast Guard faced a problem it had no aircraft to solve: drug smugglers were running open ocean “Go-Fast” boats at speeds no Coast Guard helicopter or cutter could match. The HH-65 and HH-60 were unarmed and built for rescue, not pursuit. Commandant ADM James Loy ordered the development of an armed interdiction unit, and in 2000 the Coast Guard leased eight Agusta A109E Power helicopters from Italy — designated MH-68A and unofficially known as the “Stingray” or sometimes the “Mako.”

The MH-68A was small, fast, agile, and armed with a precision rifle for disabling fire on smuggler outboards. Crewed by the new Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) based at Cecil Field in Jacksonville, Florida, the Stingray was the first armed Coast Guard helicopter and pioneered tactics that are still used today.

The lease ended in 2008 and HITRON transitioned to armed MH-65s, but for eight years the Coast Guard’s most lethal aviation asset was an Italian executive helicopter painted Coast Guard colors.

What Comes Next

The Coast Guard is now eighty years into rotary-wing aviation. From three fabric-covered Sikorsky HNS-1s in a Brooklyn hangar to a planned all-Jayhawk fleet of 127 aircraft, the service has flown roughly a dozen distinct helicopter types. Several were one-of-a-kind oddities — the Flying Banana, the only-for-Coast-Guard Seaguard, the leased Italian Mako. The Coast Guard didn’t invent the helicopter, but it was the first U.S. service to commit to it as a core mission, and the rescue hoist that hangs beneath every modern Coast Guard helicopter is a direct descendant of the one Frank Erickson designed in 1944.

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Recreational Boating Safety: 2024 in Review

The U.S. Coast Guard released its 2024 Recreational Boating Statistics Report on July 1, 2025, and the headline shows improvement: 556 boating fatalities nationwide, the lowest annual total since the Coast Guard began keeping statistics more than 50 years ago. The fatality rate was 4.8 deaths per 100,000 registered recreational vessels — a 2% drop from 2023, and dramatically lower than the 20.6 per 100,000 recorded in 1971, the year the Safe Boating Act was passed.

Within that good news, one trend stands out for our area: **paddle craft accounted for 26% of recreational boating deaths in 2024 — second only to open motorboats (46%) and ahead of every other vessel type.** Kayaks alone accounted for 16% of fatalities; standup paddleboards and canoes made up the rest. Deaths on standup paddleboards increased over 2023.

The 26% figure is partly a story about the explosive growth of paddle sports — roughly 38 million Americans paddled at some point during the year, far more than power-boated — and partly a story about who is dying. Coast Guard data analyzed by the Water Sports Foundation indicates that nearly 75% of paddle craft fatalities involve paddlers with less than 100 hours of experience. The pattern is consistent: an inexperienced paddler in cold water without a properly worn PFD, often without a means of summoning help. That cluster of risk factors describes a some of the paddlers in our AOR — kayakers are easy to launch in Bellingham Bay, Chuckanut, and Drayton Harbor, and some paddle craft owners don't prepare to handle accidents.

The other 2024 statistics that drive everything we do as Vessel Examiners, Program Visitors, and Public Education instructors haven't changed:

- ✱ **Drowning was the cause of death in three-quarters of fatalities, and 87% of those who drowned were not wearing a life jacket.** Check that the boats you examine carry one for every person aboard, properly sized and serviceable.
- ✱ **Roughly 70% of fatalities occurred on vessels operated by people who had never taken a boating safety course.** Boating safety education works — recommend a course at every interaction.
- ✱ **Alcohol contributed to 92 deaths, 20% of all fatalities.** Boating Under the Influence remains the single leading known contributing factor in fatal accidents.
- ✱ **The top five primary contributing factors in incidents:** operator inattention, improper lookout, operator inexperience, machinery failure, and failure to follow navigation rules.

The Coast Guard's recommendations remain: wear a life jacket, take a boating safety course, attach the engine cutoff switch lanyard, get a Vessel Safety Check, and boat sober. For paddlers, add: dress for immersion, carry a means of summoning help (handheld VHF with DSC, PLB, or satellite messenger), and file a float plan.

The full report is available at uscgboating.org.

Source: U.S. Coast Guard 2024 Recreational Boating Statistics Report; Water Sports Foundation analysis.

Station Bellingham Honored for Lummi Island Rescue

A Coast Guard Station Bellingham boat crew was recognized at the Coast Guard Foundation's Pacific Northwest Awards Dinner in Seattle in May 2025, receiving the 2025 Coast Guard Foundation Award for a high-stakes June 2024 rescue near Lummi Island.

The crew responded to an SOS triggered by a Garmin inReach satellite communicator after a family of five — two adults, three children, and a small dog — capsized their kayaks in icy three-to-five-foot seas. The Sta Bellingham boat crew worked alongside an MH-65

Dolphin helicopter crew from Coast Guard Air Station



Lummi Island, Wash – Sta Bellingham boat crew and AS Port Angeles MH-65 crew rescue a family of five and their dog after their kayaks capsized in Rosario Strait, June 9, 2024. US Coast Guard photo.

Port Angeles to recover everyone before hypothermia could turn the situation fatal. All survived.

The case is a textbook example of why the rescue chain matters from end to end. The inReach beacon got the call out when no one ashore would have known. Sector Puget Sound coordinated the response. A surface asset

and an air asset arrived together — Bellingham's 45-footer for the on-water recovery, the Port Angeles MH-65 for hoist capability and overhead command. And the families of those rescued got to come home, in part because they had carried a satellite emergency device in a kayak.

There's a takeaway for every Vessel Examiner and any Auxiliary member reading this: when you're talking to paddlers, sailors, and small-craft owners about safety equipment, satellite messengers and registered PLBs are no longer an exotic add-on. They are increasingly the difference between a successful SAR case and a tragedy. A VHF radio with DSC, satellite rescue beacon, or PLB is now a must-have piece of safety gear any recreational mariner can carry.

Bravo Zulu to the Sta Bellingham crew, and to the MH-65 aircrew from Air Station Port Angeles.

Source: Coast Guard Foundation, "Celebrating Heroes at the Coast Guard Foundation's Seattle Awards Dinner 2025," May 2025. Photo: U.S. Coast Guard.

New Beacons, New Radios

What Your Emergency Gear Can Do Now That It Couldn't Five Years Ago

The Lummi Island rescue covered earlier in this issue was made possible by a Garmin inReach. The family activated the SOS, and Iridium satellites carried the signal to the Garmin Response center, where a 24/7 emergency response coordinator confirmed the situation and contacted Sector Puget Sound. The watchstander then got Sta Bellingham and an MH-65 out of Port Angeles moving. Without that signal — and without the active subscription that made it work — the day might have ended very differently.

The story is a useful reminder that emergency communication gear has changed a lot in the last few years. As Vessel Examiners and anyone in a RBS role, we still see plenty of older equipment in the field — radios manufactured in the 1990s, beacons whose owners have never registered them. Both may work. Both will alert someone. But the newer generation of devices does things their predecessors simply cannot, and the differences matter.

A New Feature on a Few PLBs: AIS

A traditional 406 MHz PLB sends its distress alert up to the Cospas-Sarsat satellite network, which routes it

through NOAA to a Coast Guard or Air Force Rescue Coordination Center. The satellite alert is fast and global, but it has a long-recognized limitation: position updates come through slowly, often a fresh fix only every several minutes, and accurate to about 100 meters. The 121.5 MHz homing signal helps a searching aircraft narrow it down, but only once the searcher is nearly overhead. Anyone who has worked a SAR case knows what that means in practice — a 100-meter position circle, drift, and a head in the water is a hard target to find.

A handful of new PLBs — currently just two models on the market — also transmit an AIS man-overboard signal on VHF marine frequencies. Every AIS-equipped vessel within VHF range — every ferry, every tug, every commercial fishing vessel, the responding Coast Guard boat, and the MH-65 overhead — sees the survivor's position appear on its chart plotter as a flashing MOB icon, updating continuously. The Sta Bellingham 45-footer drives directly to the icon. The MH-65 from Port Angeles knows exactly where to hover. In cold Pacific Northwest water where hypothermia is measured in tens

of minutes, the on-scene phase is where minutes matter most.

As of mid-2026, the only AIS-capable PLBs available are the Ocean Signal rescueME PLB3 (sold in Europe and the rest of the world) and the ACR ResQLink AIS PLB-450 (sold in the Americas). They are essentially the same device under two brand names, both from the same parent company, and they first reached US customers in early 2023. Any PLB more than about three years old does not have AIS — the technology simply was not on the market yet. Some current-generation PLBs also include Return Link Service, which lights an indicator on the beacon when Cospas-Sarsat has confirmed receipt and location of the signal. A PLB purchased before 2023 has none of these features.

A current-generation PLB is roughly the size of a smartphone, weighs a few ounces, requires no subscription, and clips directly to a PFD. For a paddler venturing offshore — Bellingham Bay to the San Juans, the outer coast, anywhere out of cell range — a registered PLB on the PFD is a one-time investment that puts a 406 MHz satellite alert and an AIS man-overboard signal (on the AIS-capable models) into the smallest, lightest emergency kit available.

Handheld VHF Radios with DSC and Built-in GPS

Fixed-mount VHF radios sold in the U.S. since 1999 have included Digital Selective Calling — the red distress button that sends a digital mayday on Channel 70 with the boat's MMSI and (when connected to GPS) its exact position. Handheld radios took longer to catch up. For years, most handhelds were either DSC-only (requiring an external GPS connection) or GPS-only without DSC. The current generation has both built into a single waterproof, floating handheld, and the marketplace is healthy — many of the popular marine electronics manufacturers offer handheld models with integrated DSC and GPS, with current prices ranging from roughly \$150 to \$350. A handheld VHF clipped to a kayaker's PFD or a sailor's jacket can now transmit a one-button digital distress alert with position — no separate GPS connection required. The Coast Guard's Rescue 21 system, which covers all of Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, sees the boat's MMSI, owner, vessel description, and emergency contacts the moment the call hits the watchstander's screen. A handheld VHF

purchased before about 2018 is unlikely to have both DSC and built-in GPS.

A note for paddlers. A handheld VHF with built-in DSC and GPS is a small, relatively inexpensive piece of equipment — about the size of a TV remote, often under \$250 — that fits cleanly in a PFD pocket. As your VEs and PEs already preach, anything not on the paddler's person is part of the kayak, not the paddler, when the two separate. With the radio in a PFD pocket, a kayaker has Channel 16 voice for routine traffic and a one-button digital distress alert with their exact position when something goes wrong. In cold Pacific Northwest water where help is measured in minutes, a watchstander knowing exactly where the paddler is at the moment they push the button is a meaningful upgrade over a whistle and a phone in a Ziploc bag.

The MMSI Registration Question — and a Complication for Boaters in Our Area

All of the above is less effective without a programmed and registered MMSI, and registration is where many boaters fall short. The MMSI is a unique nine-digit identifier — the boat's "phone number" for DSC and AIS — and the type a boater needs depends on the radio and where the boat goes. But the more important point is what registration actually does on the receiving end.

Imagine a Sector Puget Sound watchstander getting a distress alert at 0200 on a winter night. With unregistered or out-of-date data, the screen shows a position and an identifier. That's it. With current and accurate registration, the same alert pulls up the vessel's name, type, length, hull color, owner's name and phone number, and emergency contacts — all of it on screen the moment the call hits. The MH-65 launching from Port Angeles knows it's looking for a 28-foot blue trawler with the name Salish on the transom, not "a boat in distress somewhere in the strait." The watchstander can call the owner's emergency contact while the boat crew is still putting on dry suits, finding out whether anyone is missing, what the float plan was, what the weather forecast looked like at departure. Every piece of that information shaves minutes off the search and makes the right rescue more likely.

This works across all three systems, because they cross-reference — but only if the boater has properly registered them. The same MMSI goes into the fixed VHF and the AIS together, and if the boater has registered that MMSI with BoatUS, the U.S. Power Squadrons, or

the FCC, both devices transmit a unified identity that pulls up the same vessel data on a watchstander's screen. A 406 MHz PLB or EPIRB is registered separately with NOAA at beaconregistration.noaa.gov, but the NOAA registration form asks for the MMSI of the vessel the beacon is associated with — so a properly registered beacon and a properly registered MMSI cross-reference each other in the SAR databases, and a watchstander who pulls up the beacon's hex ID can also see the linked vessel's information. One coherent registration up front, kept current as contact information changes, produces useful data on every channel a rescuer might receive an alert on. A boater who has done the work right has a unified emergency identity that survives whether the alert comes via DSC, AIS, or 406 MHz satellite.

The opposite is also true. An MMSI that has been programmed into the radio but never actually registered with anyone, or a beacon never registered with NOAA, gives the watchstander nothing — just a number and a position. A registration done correctly years ago but never updated is sometimes worse: the watchstander calls the phone number on file and reaches a person who sold the boat in 2019 and has no idea why the Coast Guard is calling them. Registration done right, kept current, is the difference between rescuers having a fighting chance and rescuers starting from nothing.

This is the real reason the MMSI question matters. The legal requirements are secondary; the practical reason to get registration right — and to keep it current — is that it makes a successful rescue dramatically more likely.

Three Situations, Three Answers

Fixed-mount radio, U.S. waters only. For a vessel that stays in U.S. waters and never visits foreign ports, the MMSI can come free from organizations like BoatUS or the U.S. Power Squadrons, both of which are FCC-authorized to assign domestic-use MMSIs. That works for the majority of recreational boaters nationally — but not for many Alert 11 readers, because the moment a Bellingham boat crosses into the Gulf Islands or anywhere in Canadian waters, the requirement changes.

Vessel that visits foreign ports. Per FCC rules and international treaty, a U.S.-flagged vessel that visits a foreign port (Canada, Mexico, the Bahamas, etc.) requires a full FCC Ship Station License, and at least one person aboard needs a Restricted Radiotelephone Operator Permit. The Ship Station License produces an internationally-recognized MMSI registered in the ITU

database, which means Canadian SAR authorities (or any country's) can pull up the vessel's information when the DSC distress call comes in. A domestic MMSI is in the U.S. database only — useful for the U.S. Coast Guard, invisible to a Canadian rescue coordinator.

Handheld radio that travels with a person. For a handheld that travels with a person rather than living on a single boat — a paddler's PFD radio, a sailor who races on different boats, a charter customer, or any handheld that goes into a dinghy as easily as the family cruiser — there is a separate MMSI category specifically for portable handhelds. These are nine-digit numbers beginning with "8" rather than the vessel format. The leading "8" tells SAR authorities that the alert is coming from a handheld with limited transmit power and battery life, which directly informs how they plan the response. Handheld-specific MMSIs are issued by the FCC (through a portable Ship Station License application) and by Shine Micro, but not by BoatUS or the U.S. Power Squadrons.

The catch most people run into: most DSC radios will only allow an MMSI to be programmed once or twice. Switching from a domestic vessel MMSI to an FCC Ship Station MMSI, or from a vessel MMSI to a proper handheld MMSI, typically means sending the radio back to the manufacturer to be reset. The right MMSI for the way the radio will actually be used should be programmed in from the start — and the registration kept current as boats, contact information, and emergency contacts change over time. A perfectly registered MMSI from 2015 with an old phone number and a previous owner's name on file is worse than no registration at all, because it points rescuers at the wrong person.

For Our Vessel Examiners and Program Visitors

When you talk to boaters this season, ask three questions: when did they last replace or upgrade their PLB or EPIRB? Does their handheld VHF have built-in DSC and GPS? And critically — when did they last update their registration, with NOAA for the beacon and with the appropriate authority for the MMSI? An old device is not a broken device. A 2015 PLB still alerts the Coast Guard. A 2015 handheld VHF still transmits voice on Channel 16. Boaters don't need to throw out working gear. But when they do replace a battery, lose a device overboard, or upgrade their kit, they should know what current models

offer that theirs do not, and they should make sure their registration data is current.

The Lummi Island family did the boring, unglamorous things right: PFDs, satellite communicator with a current subscription, float plan, conditions briefing before they launched. That's the difference between a SAR case and a tragedy.

The Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary do not endorse or recommend any specific manufacturer or product. Boaters should research their options and choose equipment that fits their needs and budget.

Sources: U.S. Coast Guard Navigation Center; NOAA SARSAT; FCC; BoatUS MMSI program; manufacturer specifications; Coast Guard Foundation.

Return to Full Mission Operations and Standard Uniform Wear

In a message to the district following the conclusion of the government shutdown, COMO Nijhuis announced that Coast Guard District Northwest is returning to fully active mission cycles and standard operational tempo. He asked all members to exercise caution and professionalism during the transition, particularly for surface operations, noting that skills and proficiency may have diminished during the extended time since many crews and operators were last underway. The Commodore directed members to take the time necessary to reestablish routines, verify readiness, and operate safely, while continuing to make safety and situational awareness a priority across every mission set.

The message also stated that, effective immediately, previous uniform restrictions have been lifted and the district is returning to normal uniform wear standards. COMO Nijhuis reminded members to wear the uniform correctly, professionally, and with pride, noting that appearance reflects the discipline, readiness, and commitment of the United States Coast Guard.

The Commodore closed by thanking all members for their professionalism, flexibility, and dedication throughout the shutdown period.

— Summarized from the official message issued by
COMO Klaas Nijhuis, Coast Guard District Northwest

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The following members are your Flotilla Staff Officers. Please contact them if you have any questions or ideas, or wish to get involved in a particular type of activity.

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Parting Shot



San Juan Islands, Wash – RBM crew patrolling the San Juan Islands, conducting boardings. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class William Kirk.