



# Maritime Domain Awareness: Sector San Diego, California

Report to Congress  
*September 15, 2023*



U.S. Coast Guard

# Foreword

September 15, 2023

I am pleased to present the following report, “Maritime Domain Awareness: Sector San Diego, California,” prepared by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 directed the submission of a report that provides an overview of the maritime domain awareness for Sector San Diego, California.

Pursuant to Congressional requirements, this report is provided to the following members of Congress:

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Sam Graves  
Chairman, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

The Honorable Rick Larsen  
Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

I would be pleased to answer any questions you have, or your staff may contact my Senate Liaison Office at (202) 224-2913 or House Liaison Office at (202) 225-4775.

Sincerely,



Linda L. Fagan  
Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard  
Commandant





# Maritime Domain Awareness: Sector San Diego, California

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# I. Legislative Language

This report responds to the language set forth in Section 11257 of the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 (Pub. L. No. 117-263), which reads:

## **SEC. 11257. REPORT ON SAN DIEGO MARITIME DOMAIN AWARENESS.**

Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commandant shall submit to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate a report containing—

- (1) an overview of the maritime domain awareness in the area of responsibility of the Coast Guard sector responsible for San Diego, California, including—
  - (A) the average volume of known maritime traffic that transited the area during fiscal years 2020 through 2022;
  - (B) current sensor platforms deployed by such sector to monitor illicit activity occurring at sea in such area;
  - (C) the number of illicit activity incidents at sea in such area that the sector responded to during fiscal years 2020 through 2022;
  - (D) an estimate of the volume of traffic engaged in illicit activity at sea in such area and the type and description of any vessels used to carry out illicit activities that such sector responded to during fiscal years 2020 through 2022; and
  - (E) the maritime domain awareness requirements to effectively meet the mission of such sector;
- (2) a description of current actions taken by the Coast Guard to partner with Federal, regional, State, and local entities to meet the maritime domain awareness needs of such area;
- (3) a description of any gaps in maritime domain awareness within the area of responsibility of such sector resulting from an inability to meet the enduring maritime domain awareness requirements of the sector or adequately respond to maritime disorder;
- (4) an identification of current technology and assets the Coast Guard has to mitigate the gaps identified in paragraph (3);
- (5) an identification of capabilities needed to mitigate such gaps, including any capabilities the Coast Guard currently possesses that can be deployed to the sector;
- (6) an identification of technology and assets the Coast Guard does not currently possess and are needed to acquire in order to address such gaps; and
- (7) an identification of any financial obstacles that prevent the Coast Guard from deploying existing commercially available sensor technology to address such gaps.

## II. Background

The California coastal region, particularly Sector San Diego's area of responsibility in the vicinity of the maritime boundary line between the United States and Mexico, is a unique mission space.

The United States' shared land and maritime boundary line with Mexico invites multiple smuggling conveyance types and poses several unique interdiction challenges. Smuggling events can start and finish within minutes or last days. Conveyances include individual or mass swimmer events, small jet-skis, pangas, and pleasure craft.

The number of persons per event vary from one to 30 with one to four smugglers for conveyances, and from one to over 150 per event for swimmers. Multiple events occur daily, often simultaneously, and occur near major ports with significant concentrations of public, commercial, and military vessel traffic. Landings routinely occur across the diverse coastline from the border to north of Los Angeles, including rugged cliffs, areas with breaking surf, popular tourist areas, neighborhoods, marinas, and numerous military facilities.

Maritime domain awareness supports the ability to interrupt and/or intercept illicit activity in the maritime environment.

### III. Report

Commercial vessel arrivals in the Port of San Diego are tracked and reported to Sector San Diego and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations by vessels required to submit an Advanced Notice of Arrival. This information is entered into the Coast Guard's Ships Arrival Notification System (SANS). The number of vessel arrivals to the Port of San Diego include:

- Fiscal Year 2020: 630
- Fiscal Year 2021: 523
- Fiscal Year 2022: 690

In addition to monitoring commercial vessel arrivals entered in SANS, current sensor platforms are deployed by Sector San Diego, and the local Regional Coordinating Mechanism (ReCoM)<sup>1</sup> to monitor illicit activity. These include:

- A variety of deployed boats, cutters, and aircraft (manned and unmanned);
- A coastal surveillance system, which integrates feeds from a variety of local cameras and radars;
- CBP's Air and Marine Operations Surveillance System;
- Rescue 21;<sup>2</sup> and
- Digital recorders, video recorders.

Using these detection methods, Sector San Diego responded to 1,182 illicit maritime activity incidents between fiscal years 2020 and 2022. These activities break down as follows:

- Fiscal Year 2020: 292 events
- Fiscal Year 2021: 307 events
- Fiscal Year 2022: 583 events

Illicit activity can include individual or mass swimmer events, small jet-skis, pangas, and myriad pleasure craft that blend in with normal vessel traffic. Due to the nature and difficulty detecting such conveyances, it is not possible to estimate the volume of illicit traffic beyond the number of "illicit maritime activity incidents" already provided. As such, there is a level of illicit activity that remains unknown or undetected by the Coast Guard and its maritime partners.

The Coast Guard works in coordination with interagency partners to maintain maritime domain awareness in the region. To effectively capture and develop maritime domain awareness requirements, the Coast Guard actively coordinates with other Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agencies in California with maritime equities in an effort to jointly assess the need for broader, more comprehensive, and joint maritime domain awareness capability. As a result, joint mission needs are being developed for persistent wide-area maritime surveillance in coastal regions of the United States. This effort is the initial step to establish a formal program through the DHS Joint Requirements Integration and Management System (JRIMS).

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<sup>1</sup> ReCoMs were established as part of the Maritime Operations Coordination Plan signed by the Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement in-2011.

<sup>2</sup> Rescue 21 is the Coast Guard's advanced command, control and direction-finding communications system that was created to better locate mariners in distress and save lives and property at sea and on navigable rivers.

The operational requirements that are foundational to this work are:

- Surveillance and monitoring.
- Detection, classification, identification, and understanding.

Additionally, the future program will evaluate activities and capabilities identified as high-level operational gaps in maritime domain awareness and specific to the Coast Guard Sector San Diego area of responsibility. These include:

- Information sharing agreements with Mexico to provide human intelligence regarding illicit maritime activity.
- Enterprise capability to share data critical to achieving shared maritime domain awareness with collaborating partners.
- Enterprise object detection and artificial intelligence/machine learning capability to enhance understanding of maritime domain awareness-related information and provide automatic alerting/cueing to operators.
- Enterprise persistent sensor capability within the United States coastal region (coastline out to 200 nautical miles) to provide adequate detection, classification, and identification information to operational users.

To address these areas, the Coast Guard, other DHS components, and local, state, and tribal law enforcement agencies have coordinated to establish a Joint Program Management Office to address requirements related to information/data sharing. The identification of capabilities needed to mitigate identified gaps will be addressed during the JRIMS process.

While these requirements are under development, the Coast Guard continues to partner with agencies that are critical enablers in the Sector San Diego area of responsibility. The DHS ReCoM is an example of this partnership, and is the unified approach used by DHS agencies with a maritime nexus, to counter illicit activity in the area. Both intelligence and operations are coordinated with the ReCoM. In this forum, representatives from each agency contribute intelligence and coordinate interdiction options in real-time. This approach consolidates and coordinates limited assets; however, it requires constant and close coordination to adapt to the ever-changing resource demand and asset availability. The San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco ReCoMs perform similar coordinating functions with a state-wide Executive Steering Committee and the executives who oversee ReCoM activities across the state.

The Joint Program Management Office, to include the Coast Guard, recognizes that industry continues to develop and market technologies for broader maritime domain awareness. While some are available and could be quickly deployed, to provide an enduring and sustainable capability, identification of appropriate and specific technology and assets is part of the JRIMS process. Operational needs and the concepts for how solutions could be employed across Coast Guard statutory missions will continue to be defined. The Joint-Integrated Project Teams continue to work these issues within the JRIMS process. Future decisions on resourcing will take place once the JRIMS process is completed.

## IV. Conclusion

The Coast Guard continues to leverage its capabilities and partnerships to monitor maritime activity in the Sector San Diego area of responsibility. The Coast Guard's ability to maintain maritime domain awareness is critical to understanding and responding to the trends and complexity of illicit activity associated with transnational criminal organizations. The Coast Guard is committed to continuing its efforts to enhance maritime domain awareness in the Sector San Diego area of responsibility.



## Appendix: Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
JRIMS	Joint Requirements Integration and Management System
ReCoM	Regional Coordinating Mechanism
SANS	Ship Arrival Notification System