



GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE CITIES INITIATIVE
COMMENTS ON
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD WEAPONS TRAINING ON THE
GREAT LAKES
NOVEMBER 13, 2006

The Great Lakes have served as a symbol of the peaceful and cooperative friendship between the people of the United States and Canada for almost two hundred years. The Lakes are a shared resource which has contributed to the quality of life and economic well being of millions of citizens of both countries over the years. They are by far the largest source of surface fresh water on the planet.

The Twenty First Century presents a new set of challenges for both countries and for the Great Lakes. The Lakes will continue to have tremendous economic significance and, as a source of fresh water, a place for recreation, and a means of transportation, they will continue to have global significance. At the same time, with threats to security becoming a greater concern, all countries must maintain vigilance against risks presented to the safety of their citizens. Canada and the United States are no exception. It is with this understanding that the mayors of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative support increased security measures taken by the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard has a long and proud tradition of protecting the public on the Lakes, which is recognized widely in both countries.

Mayors from across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence fully appreciate and support measures taken by both countries to increase the security of the people. On a daily basis, mayors make decisions to enhance the safety, health, and well being of their citizens. When there are threats to the security of the public, local law enforcement officers and emergency responders are often the first to deal with the situation, are there throughout the response, and continue long after others have left.

Although mayors fully appreciate the need for added security, the Coast Guard's proposal to conduct weapons training in 34 zones across the Great Lakes presents an unacceptable risk to the public health, safety, and the environment that should not be implemented. Testimony during nine public hearings across the United States side of the



Great Lakes has raised serious questions about the safety of boaters and anglers in and near the firing zones. In addition, the toxic metal pollution deposited in the Lakes from the ammunition used for training is not adequately understood and presents an unnecessary threat to the drinking water of millions of United States and Canadian citizens. Both countries have worked diligently for years to remove contaminants from the waters and to keep new pollution out of the Great Lakes. To begin adding thousands of pounds of metals to the Lakes intentionally on an annual basis makes no sense.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative understands the need for the Coast Guard to train its men and women in service. In these times, there are many alternatives to firing weapons that deposit metals from ammunition into the fresh waters of the Great Lakes. Much training is done with simulators, and the Coast Guard has other water bodies available for exercises. Although simulators are never the same as the real experience, the sophistication of today's technology should provide high level training to the people in the Coast Guard to prepare them for action.

Balancing all the risks and threats to security and the public health, safety, and the environment, the mayors of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative strongly recommend that the United States Coast Guard permanently discontinue weapons training on the Great Lakes and seek alternatives to prepare their people to deal with the threats that may be presented in the future.

The Board of Directors
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative