

Hurricane Tracking and the Future of the Marine Industry

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Panelists:

Tim Osborn – National Oceanographic & Atmospheric Administration

The U.S. population is moving toward the coasts. The baby-boom demographic is most especially responsible for investment and development of property directly on the coastlines with the ramifications for loss in the event of hurricanes and major coastal storms well documented. Yachting and recreational boating have likewise gained in popularity, the sea being viewed as the last frontier for recreation, stress relief and self-directed environmental education opportunities for the populace. This growth places still more lives and property in potential harm's way of maritime tropical disturbances.

Following a recap of U.S. Atlantic and Gulf Coast hurricanes through recent years, NOAA's Tim Osborn underscored these storms' capricious nature due to the changeability of track as well as strength fluctuations. Whatever link exists between global warming and the current increase in the number and strength of tropical storms, this activity is always cause for great concern in the boating community.

Basic storm safety preparedness is crucial for yacht Owners and coastal residents alike. Mr. Osborn reiterated the need for a general plan of action for evacuating your family, protecting your business and securing property, including boats, which would be impacted in the event of a coastal storm. Tim further recommended that anyone with marine interests prepare a general plan for conducting affairs if access to your business, property or boat(s) is impossible for an extended period during and following a storm. Transient yachts need especially to be aware that fuel may remain locally unavailable for days or weeks following a hurricane.

Tim is in charge of updating NOAA's navigational chart products and for researching and developing coast and hydrographic surveys and new products available from NOAA for the maritime community. As such, he supplemented his discussion with amplification and updates on electronic chart developments both by NOAA and available through private vendors with compatible electronic viewing and navigation systems. In contrast with paper charts, accurate to within 50 meters, differential GPS units commonly used in the yacht market are accurate to within 30 feet, indicating a need for improved chart products. Further, paper charts commonly show what some consider a surfeit of land and marine features to a distracting level. NOAA electronic navigation charts (ENCs) were developed to alleviate these drawbacks. Funded by tax dollars, NOAA ENCs are available at no charge to the public. Tim noted that the U.S. is the only nation that distributes its ENCs free of charge.

Private boat owners/operators likely will not use NOAA ENCs. Although the private vendors use NOAA's ENCs to develop products compatible with their hardware, the view utilities of state-of-the-art systems on the market are superior to what the government could produce or make available. Meanwhile, paper charts will remain available for several years at least, and print-on-demand charts for U.S. waters are available from retailers such as West Marine for roughly US\$20.