

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

May 9, 2023

Admiral Linda Fagan
Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard
The Douglas A. Munro Coast Guard Headquarters Building
2703 Martin Luther King Junior Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20593

Dear Admiral Fagan,

Last November, the U.S. Coast Guard completed an incredible rescue of a cruise passenger who was in the water for hours after going overboard.¹ We write to congratulate the Coast Guard for this extraordinary rescue and ensure it has the resources necessary to continue carrying out such search-and-rescue (SAR) missions in an effective manner.

Despite the Coast Guard's thrilling SAR operation last year, such positive outcomes in overboard incidents are rare. According to data on 212 cruise overboard incidents between 2009 and 2019, only 48 persons were successfully rescued – a mere 28 percent.² Time is a critical factor in overboard incidents: the delay between an incident's occurrence and the person's friend or family reporting them missing can dangerously expand the search grid and decrease the likelihood of a successful rescue. It is imperative that the Coast Guard and cruise lines take all possible steps to reduce overboard incidents and prevent overboard fatalities.

There are existing mechanisms to help advance success of Coast Guard SAR missions. The 2010 Cruise Vessel Safety and Security Act (CVSSA) requires cruise vessels to “integrate technology that can be used for capturing images of passengers or detecting passengers who have fallen overboard.”³ This life-saving technology exists, and some cruise ships have begun installing these systems.⁴ Further, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) created publically available, internationally agreed upon technical specifications for man overboard (MOB) detection technology.⁵ The widespread implementation of an approved MOB technology would help ensure the Coast Guard has timely and accurate information during SAR missions. Any delays in implementing solutions could be the difference between life and death in the next overboard incident.

To that end, we respectfully request answers to the following questions by May 23, 2023:

¹ Maria Cramer, “A Man Fell From a Cruise Ship. And Survived,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), December 1, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/01/travel/cruise-ship-overboard-survival.html?smid=em-share>.

² Cruise Lines International Association, “Report on Operational Incidents 2009 to 2019,” March 2020, https://cruising.org/-/media/research-updates/report_operational_incidents_2019-v-1.

³ Cruise Vessel Safety and Security Act of 2010, 46 U.S.C. §3507 (2010).

⁴ Cramer, “A Man Fell Overboard From a Cruise Ship. And Survived.”

⁵ ISO 21195:2020, “Ships and Marine Technology – Systems for the Detection of Persons While Going Overboard from Ships (Man Overboard Detection),” <https://www.iso.org/standard/76051.html>.

1. What type of overboard prevention systems does the Coast Guard currently require installed on cruise vessels? If such requirements do not include systems that (i) capture images of, (ii) detect, or (iii) both capture images of and detect passengers who have gone overboard, please explain why not.
2. Please describe the Coast Guard's understanding of the status and commercial availability of image capture systems and detection systems for cruise vessels.
3. Please describe the level of collaboration between international standards organizations like ISO and the Coast Guard on overboard detection technology systems.
4. Does the Coast Guard recognize the ISO MOB detection technology standards? If not, please explain why not.
5. Please describe any steps the Coast Guard plans to take to further prevent fatalities from overboard incidents and improve SAR operations, including the status of any rulemaking efforts and the development of an enforcement plan.
6. Does the Coast Guard require any additional resources or further congressional direction to effectively enforce the CVSSA, particularly in relation to overboard incidents?
7. Does the Coast Guard require any additional resources to ensure the effective operation of SAR missions more broadly?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator


DORIS MATSUI
Member of Congress


EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senator


LLOYD DOGGETT
Member of Congress