

IALA – I’ve Heard of it, But What is it, Really?

CAPT Wayne Muilenburg
Chief, Office of Waterways Management (CG-541)
U.S. Councillor to IALA

Those of us with an interest in and responsibility for maritime navigation safety have likely heard of the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities ... or “IALA” for short. Yes, I know the acronym doesn’t exactly match the name, but when the organization started it was focused on lighthouses, and it has since expanded its role considerably. Unfortunately, “IAMATNLA” doesn’t roll off the tongue as easily as “IALA,” so those in charge wisely decided to keep it simple and stick with the original acronym.

But what many folks don’t know is how IALA is structured, what purpose it serves, and how active the US Coast Guard is in it.

IALA is, simply, an international, non-governmental technical association charged with fostering the safety and efficient navigation of vessels through improvement and harmonization of aids to navigation worldwide. IALA membership is comprised of marine aids to navigation authorities and professionals from around the globe, manufacturers, and consultants, all of whom are committed to maritime navigation safety and protection of the maritime environment. Its members work together to foster international cooperation and alignment in matters impacting marine navigation. IALA’s expertise is sought around the world to assist with ATON system design and training standards, radionavigation issues, navigation risk assessment and disaster recovery within the maritime realm.

IALA takes an expansive view of “aids to navigation;” the world’s various visual aids to navigation systems – buoys, beacons, lights, etc – are just one component of what IALA considers “ATON.” Included in this spectrum is any maritime system or service that aids maritime navigation: Vessel traffic management (which includes VTS), a variety of radionavigation systems (LORAN, DGPS, etc), pilotage issues, the Automatic Identification System (AIS), the systems and processes involved in the emerging concept of enhanced Navigation (“eNav”), maritime risk management, ATON-related quality management systems, etc.

IALA is recognized internationally as the authoritative source for ATON information. Collectively, its members represent a body of international navigation expertise, and it has no rival in the world. Seventy-four countries are members, and twenty-four member countries – of which the United States is one - comprise the IALA Council. IALA is headquartered in St. Germain-en-Laye, France, a suburb of Paris, although meetings can and do occur throughout the world.

The “heartbeat” of IALA, as Secretary-General Torsten Kruise puts it, are the four technical committees (and two technical panels) that work to develop common worldwide standards, in the form of recommendations and guidelines, for maritime navigation safety: ANM (Aid to Navigation Management), VTS (Vessel Traffic Systems), eNav (Enhanced Electronic Navigation), and EEP (Engineering/ Environment/Preservation). In addition, panels were recently created to discuss legal issues (the Legal Advisory Panel) and pilotage issues (the Pilotage Advisory Forum). The U.S. (specifically, the Coast Guard) has members on all six

committees, and leads two: Mr. Mike Sollosi is Chair of the VTS Committee, and Mr. Bill Cairns is Chair of the quickly expanding eNav Committee. Both work within CG-5413, Navigation Systems Division, and both have been involved with IALA for well over a decade. The Coast Guard has been a national member of IALA since its inception in 1957.

These six Committees, and the IALA Council, generally meet twice each year for four or five days; in addition, IALA organizes and hosts a multitude of symposia, conferences, and workshops for maritime navigation professionals around the world. It's an extremely busy and active association, which keeps the small Executive Secretariat hopping.

That the Coast Guard has benefited enormously from its association with IALA is inarguable. As the global maritime industry continues to evolve with rapid technological developments, ship design, and operations, it too looks to IALA to help promote standardization and lend expertise to increasingly complex navigation issues.

Further information about IALA can be found at www.iala-aism.org.