

The Coast Guard worked closely with NASA and SpaceX to plan the recovery of the Dragon crew in a way that prioritized the safety of the boating public and those involved in the recovery operations.

Mariners were alerted to pending hazardous operations within a specified boundary by a Broadcast Notice to Mariners, issued 29 July.

The establishment of an official safety zone that authorizes the Coast Guard to hold legal authority over boaters in violation of entering an area was not available due to the targeted splashdown location being outside of the navigable waterways of the United States, which in most cases is limited to 12-nautical miles from shore.

A Coast Guard 87-foot patrol boat established a physical presence four hours before the scheduled splashdown to discourage boaters from entering within 10-nautical miles of the NASA-designated splashdown zone, for their safety from potential dangers associated with the operation. A Coast Guard 45-foot response boat was also deployed to the vicinity leading up to the scheduled splashdown.

Additionally, a radio broadcast was issued to mariners two hours before the scheduled splashdown to remind boaters of the operation and to stay clear.

With limited assets available and with no formal authority to establish zones that would stop boaters from entering the area, numerous boaters ignored the Coast Guard crews' requests and decided to encroach the area, putting themselves and those involved in the operation in potential danger.

While the Coast Guard has the legal authority to board vessels and enforce laws past the 12-mile navigable waterways rule, it would have required a massive undertaking of resources to engage each boat that came into the area and suspend their voyage or otherwise escort them out.

The boating public is often a valuable resource to the Coast Guard, and the spirit of cooperation we share is a relationship built upon 230 years of trust and understanding. The actions of those boaters today were not representative of the average boating community, and they put themselves and others at risk through their actions. This lack of regard for safety is something that the Coast Guard takes very seriously.

A comprehensive review of this operation will be conducted between the Coast Guard, NASA, and SpaceX, and the development of lessons learned will be our next priority moving forward.