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Most downtown river, lake traffic to be shut for 8 days around NATO

By: Paul Merrion March 09, 2012

(Crain's)—To assure NATO summit security, the U.S. Coast Guard is taking steps to shut down all boat traffic on much of the Chicago River and Lake Michigan near downtown Chicago between May 16 and May 24.

This latest directive goes far beyond a statement by the Secret Service last month that boats would not be allowed to dock at Burnham Harbor, which is adjacent to McCormick Place where the summit will be held on May 20 and 21.

According to a notice in the Federal Register this week, the Coast Guard wants to keep all boats--and people--more than a mile away from waters surrounding Burnham Harbor and the nearby shoreline of Lake Michigan.

The Coast Guard also wants to shut down traffic on a four-mile stretch of the Chicago River, from the Chicago Tribune Wharf to the Loomis Street coal storage terminal slip. The river would also be shut down from the point where the north and south branches connect to the Chicago Controlling Works Lock at the mouth of the Chicago River near Navy Pier.

Another circular area of Lake Michigan within a 2,000-yard radius of the Chicago Lock would be off limits to boat traffic.

That would probably affect boaters using DuSable and Monroe Street harbors, said Grant Crowley, president of Chicago-based Crowley's Yacht Yard Lakeside LLC.

"I think people are going to be inconvenienced, but there's not enough information to comment," he said, noting that it's unclear whether the zones will allow the Coast Guard to shut down when a motorcade goes or whether they will be shut down for the entire May 16-24 period before and after the May 20-21 summit.

In its notice, the Coast Guard said vessels may move within a zone with the permission of the Coast Guard official in charge of Lake Michigan. A Coast Guard spokeswoman did not respond to an email seeking comment.

It is possible the duration of the security zones will change. The notice was published last Tuesday, one day after President Barack Obama decided to hold the G8 summit at Camp David instead of Chicago, originally scheduled to start May 19. But the notice calling for security zones between May 16 and May 24 refers to both summits.
