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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**COAST GUARD ON ALERT FOR ILLEGAL CHARTER BOATS
DURING CHINCOTEAGUE PONY SWIM**

NORFOLK, VA – The Coast Guard is cautioning tourists attending the pony swim in Chincoteague, Virginia on July 30th to avoid boats that do not have licensed captains, and in some cases have not been inspected by the Coast Guard. Jerry Crooks, Chief of Investigations for Coast Guard Sector Hampton Roads, stated that the Coast Guard will be aggressively enforcing federal regulations intended to ensure the safety of the public during the event. “We will be boarding and citing vessels that do not have licensed captains, or vessels carrying more than six passengers without the required Certificate of Inspection,” said Crooks.

The Coast Guard advises tourists to ask the boat’s captain to show you his or her original Coast Guard license. If the boat is carrying more than six passengers it is required to be inspected by the Coast Guard, and the Certificate of Inspection should be displayed in an area accessible to passengers.

Illegal charter boats pose a number of risks. The captain and crew may not have formal training, and in most cases do not conduct required drills, exercises, or passenger safety briefings. In addition, the crews of illegal charter boats are not subject to pre-employment or random drug testing. The boats may not carry proper lifesaving and firefighting equipment, or the equipment may be in poor condition. And very few illegal vessels meet the minimum required Federal standards for machinery, hull construction, wiring, stability, safety railings, or navigation equipment.

Another risk factor is the lack of insurance. Although not required by Federal law, passengers aboard charter vessels should ask whether the boat is insured as a passenger vessel. If not, they may be unable to pursue a claim if they are injured while aboard.

The Coast Guard is reaching out to the owners of vessels that are advertising trips for the pony swim to ensure they operate legally. “If an owner operates illegally, after being forewarned, it will be considered a willful violation and the Coast Guard will seek maximum penalties,” Crooks said. “Vessel owners and operators can receive civil penalties in the thousands of dollars, and in the case of Coast Guard licensed captains who carry more than six passengers, the Coast Guard can initiate action seeking to suspend or revoke their license.”

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