

# HAMPTON ROADS BRACES FOR WORST SECURITY BEEFED UP AT BASES, PORTS HERE AND ACROSS COUNTRY:[Final Edition]

PETER DUJARDIN *Daily Press*. **Daily Press**. Newport News, Va.: Feb 14, 2003. pg. A.1

**Full Text** (960 words)

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Local, state and federal agencies along with military installations were on high alert throughout Hampton Roads on Thursday as a tense country braced for the possibility of a terrorist attack.

With war looming in Iraq and signs that the al-Qaida network is planning to strike again, the nation's security threat level is at Code Orange, the second highest on a five point scale. The high-alert status is evident all over the region.

Outside area military bases, rush-hour traffic congestion has been a visible sign of increased security. At Langley Air Force Base, barriers and cones were set up at all gates. Drivers waited more than 30 minutes to get onto the base as military police did more extensive identification checks on the workers coming through.

But that was a big improvement from waits of an hour and a half earlier this week, when traffic got so bad near the base that children in school buses were late for school, said Hampton police spokesman Jimmie Wideman. Wideman and Hampton police urge people to avoid roads near military bases.

An Air Force spokesman, Capt. David May, said Langley was trying to relieve the problem by staggering work shifts and putting more people at the gate.

"It's hard on us, but for the most part, people understand," said May of the new alert level. "It's for our own safety and it's well worth it."

Area waterways, too, are seeing heightened security. Coast Guard teams of six to 12 people, many on gunboats, are boarding more cargo ships to search crews, and standing watch on the bridge as ships ride into the terminals. The Coast Guard called up 50 new reservists over the weekend to work in Hampton Roads, allowing for the increased boat searches.

The Virginia Marine Patrol, a state division that usually focuses on patrolling inland waterways, as well as other city marine patrols have in recent days begun helping the Coast Guard protect some of the more sensitive areas of the harbor typically patrolled by the Coast Guard.

"The cooperation from the local marine police is allowing us to concentrate on some of the larger ships for offshore boarding and checks," said Coast Guard Capt. Lawrence M. Brooks, captain of the port and the officer in charge of marine inspection.

The Coast Guard also has added surveillance flights over the harbor.

The Virginia Port Authority, the state agency that oversees the state-owned shipping terminals, also has stepped up security. When vendors come to the terminals to make deliveries, police now are checking to make sure that the equipment being delivered is actually expected.

Port police are closely restricting access to the waterfront by privately owned vehicles, either owned by longshoremen or others, said Bob Merhige, the Port Authority's deputy executive director, general counsel and head of security.

"We need to be more vigilant in terms of access to the docks with vehicles," Merhige said. "Obviously there is a greater reason for concern in terms of an explosive device with a vehicle than with a pedestrian."

Controlling personnel access to the waterfront area is designed to prevent terrorists from gaining access to cargo ships. The fear is that someone could plant a bomb on board a ship and have it go off, say, near the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel -- or that someone could hijack a ship and crash it into a Navy warship.

With the new security alert, passengers at Newport News/ Williamsburg International Airport and Norfolk International Airport now have to undergo random inspections of cars in the parking lot. There's also an increased presence of law enforcement at the terminal, with airport police being called in to work overtime shifts.

But all of the checked and carry-on baggage inspections are at the same high level of caution as before the new alert, said Paul E. Storer, the Transportation Security Administration's deputy federal security director for the Newport News airport.

The Joint Terrorism Task Force, made up of local officials from the FBI, the Department of Justice, the Coast Guard, the Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, said it was busy coordinating efforts, but was mum on the details.

Norfolk FBI spokesman Phil Mann said the public should be reassured but shouldn't let its guard down.

"An alert public is an important element in the fight against terrorism," Mann said.

The public should report any known security threats to the task force at (757) 455-0100, or to a local police department.

Companies with sensitive security concerns declined to talk much about their heightened security efforts. Security was very high at the Surry nuclear power station, an electric plant owned by Dominion Resources, according to company spokesman Rick Zuercher. But he would not comment on what was being done.

Other companies were making sure their security teams are on alert, said Chris Stuart of Top Guard Security, a large Hampton security company that is hired by area firms and federal job sites.

"They're sending out reminders, memorandums, things of that sort," Stuart said.

"They're making sure that patterns of checking buildings and other things aren't ignored. When a code system happens, they have to be that much more on their toes."

## REPORT THREATS

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## **[Illustration]**

Photos (color) by The Associated Press; Caption: ABOVE: A Massachusetts Port Authority security vehicle patrols the Paul W. Conley Container Terminal on Wednesday in Boston. LEFT: A U.S. Coast guard helicopter flies by the Empire State Building in New York on Wednesday. TOP: Three Capitol Hill police officers patrol outside the Dirksen Senate Office Building on Thursday in Washington, D.C.

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