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Port of Tampa helps secure GOP convention in the face of hurricane

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By: [Mark Rackwell](#)

As the world watched split-screen television reports of Hurricane Isaac and coverage of the Republican National Convention in Tampa, FL, the security director at the Port of Tampa, was dealing with the double-barreled impact of both at his busy shipping installation.



Port of Tampa

The Port of Tampa is a close neighbor of the Tampa Bay Times Forum, the site of the RNC convention. It has been planning and implementing security measures to help secure the port and the site before and during the event.

The port, which covers 5,000-square-acres, is a close neighbor of the Forum, with one of its cruise ship terminals only a quarter of a mile away from the convention site. Mark Dubina, director of security at the port, told *Government Security News* in an interview on Aug. 29.

The port, among the busiest in the nation with cargo and passenger ship traffic coming and going constantly, had to make sure its operations didn't interfere with security for the delegates and participants at the convention. The planning for the event took 18 months, said Dubina. The security checklist included making sure hazardous materials at the port were secure, hiring additional guards and additional security personnel, and coordination with federal and local law enforcements and most importantly with the [U.S. Coast Guard](#) which was in charge of the extensive waterways and shipping channels in the area, he said.

The port not only insured security up front, but also beefed up security for the event while it was going on, even as [Tropical Storm Isaac](#) threatened to throw the event and its planning into chaos, according to Dubina.

The storm ultimately brushed Tampa on its way to the northern Gulf Coast where it bloomed into a hurricane and lashed New Orleans, Alabama and Mississippi with drenching rain and high winds on Aug. 29.

"Thursday and Friday were tense," said Dubina, as the storm approached the Gulf from the Caribbean threatening Tampa. It ultimately turned westward mostly away from the city, but forced an abbreviated convention schedule on Aug. 27 as its path was uncertain.

Dubina said the security technology the port had installed to monitor the water side of the convention center has been key in securing the site, but has also provided experience for the port to draw on in the future.

That technology, he said, includes wide angle cameras that give a panoramic view of the site, as well as situational software that could offer up suggestions on how to handle any number of difficulties, from incoming shipping traffic to weather complications.

The port installed two WAVcam wide angle, long-range surveillance cameras that can produce persistent, panoramic views of the site that allows operators to pan tilt and zoom into out specific area of interest within the image on their monitors. A single WAVcam sensor provides full resolution telephoto images over a 90 degree wide field of view with a refresh rate of 1 to 2 images per second, according to the company. "The camera can replace between 40-170 typical high definition discreet sensors," according to Ray Hollida, application engineer at Innovative Signal Analysis, the company that worked with the port on the installation. Two of the cameras, said Hollida, provided detailed views of the waterfront of the convention site and the various commercial shipping channels in the port. "We can see possible traffic along the waterfront of the event day and night," he said.

Along with the cameras, the port also installed a situational awareness system that was on the lookout for strange, anomalous activity. The Command Bridge system from the Harner Group, said company president Steve Dryden, provided "a predictive measuring tool for ship movement" in the area, as well as an array of other capabilities.

The system's software assembles data from multiple sources, like security cameras and weather feeds, focusing them in a summarized operational picture that can present users with options for action.

That capability, said Dubina, was particularly valuable as he juggled Coast Guard convention waterway restrictions, a potential hurricane and busy shipping traffic.

The Coast Guard had designated 15 security zones in Tampa's waterways before and during the convention to make sure unauthorized water traffic stayed clear.

Authorized commercial shipping was to have been able to move through the security zones, said Dubina, but all that changed as Isaac approached. The Coast Guard shut down shipping traffic into and out of the port on the eve of the convention as Isaac loomed.

"The restrictions and weather," he said, "were an unusual situation." He said the port could use the situational software to track individual ship movements ahead of the closures. "That provided an extra confidence" to handle the approaching storm, he said. "It ensured we were complying with the restrictions more easily," he said.

The port is using the equipment as part of a technology demonstration, according to Dubina, Hollida and Dryden. None of the technology has been officially purchased, but it has allowed the port to get unprecedented access and real-world experience with the advanced technology, said Dubina.

"We'll take the lessons learned going forward," he said, adding that the port is always considering new technologies and the new technology used during the convention gave it a unique perspective. "The convention and the hurricane proved the technology in the real-world," he said.

The technology supplies said likewise. The experience at the port and with the convention showed them how the technology works and how it might not, giving engineers and developers more gnost to use in growing it.

"It's a win-win for everyone," said Dubina.

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