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SUPERYACHT SECURITY INDUSTRY QUESTIONS CURRENT PROTECTIONS

By Kenny Wooten
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[The following is a supplied article from a public relations agency, Merchant Technology Marketing, but it highlights some valid issues facing the superyacht industry regarding security. —Ed.]

Several leading security experts have questioned whether superyacht shipyards are taking maritime security seriously enough when recommending the specification of new build projects. Furthermore, they state that little is being done to ensure the appropriate systems are in place to help guarantee safety on board in the future, following recent reports that the global piracy situation remains highly problematic.

The latest figures, released by International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) piracy reporting center, indicate the issue of piracy is still growing in some regions, and doing so at an alarming rate. What's more, even in areas benefiting from a concerted international effort to target the perpetrators, attacks are continuing.

"In the first quarter of 2012, there were over 100 confirmed incidents of piracy and armed robbery, with big increases in West African waters. Whereas historically the epicenter of pirate activity was Somalia, today, although Somali pirates are still the most active, the biggest growth in incidents is coming from Nigerians operating off Africa's coast, demonstrating that this issue isn't restricted to one area of water or geographical region," commented Simon Rowland, director of security consultants Veritas International.

"So far the recreational marine sector has remained relatively unscathed, with very few successful boardings. However, as restrictions on commercial vessels carrying firearms are relaxed, it is expected that the pirates will look to pursue perceived softer targets, and that is likely to mean more attempts on recreational vessels," Rowland added.

The issue of utilizing armed personnel on board superyachts continues to dominate the headlines, but as MarineGuard's managing director Richard Webb points out, that is only one of the available options.

"There are, without question, many situations where the use of trained security personnel is wise or even essential. However, in many cases, the installation of an appropriate, integrated security system could easily provide the same level of protection.

"The challenge within the industry is to educate those responsible for specifying the security element of new superyachts. If anti-piracy and terrorism measures were considered a more important part of the build process, large cost reductions could be made and seamless integration of the available technologies would be easily achieved."

Webb also suggests that security is too often tacked onto the end of a project and considered almost an optional extra, rather than an essential part of safeguarding a client's safety. It is known that shipyards have regularly used inexperienced audio and visual providers to install highly technical security systems—a practice Webb and those working in the security industry claim they simply cannot understand.

"Using AV providers to install security is akin to employing a mechanic to install your yacht's interior but too many people responsible for making that decision just don't seem to see it. That is one of the areas where a change in mindset is required. Owners and their representatives need to be more involved in instructing shipyards to consider security earlier on. They should also ensure that only those who truly understand security are on hand to help with the specification process. No one wants to add unnecessary expense or delay to a new build project but equally, when lives are plausibly at risk, security cannot continue to be maligned."