

COVID-19 Causes Boeing to Suspend Puget Sound Production



A P-8A Poseidon sits parked on the apron of Naval Air Station Sigonella, Italy, on Feb. 26. The P-8A Poseidon is manufactured by Boeing, which is suspending production in the Puget Sound area in the wake of the outbreak of the coronavirus in Washington state. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Juan Sua

CHICAGO — Boeing has temporarily suspended production operations at its Puget Sound-area facilities in light of the state of emergency in Washington state and the company's continuous assessment of the accelerating spread of the coronavirus in the region, the company said in a release.

These actions are being taken to ensure the well-being of employees, their families and the local community and will include an orderly shutdown consistent with the requirements of its customers, the Boeing release said.

Boeing planned to begin reducing production activity on March 23 and projects the suspension of such operations to begin on March 25 at sites across the Puget Sound area. The suspension of production operations is set to last 14 days, during which Boeing will continue to monitor government guidance and actions on COVID-19 and its associated impacts on all company operations. During this time, Boeing will deep-clean at impacted sites and establish rigorous criteria for return to work.

"This necessary step protects our employees and the communities where they work and live," Boeing President and CEO Dave Calhoun said.

“We continue to work closely with public health officials, and we’re in contact with our customers, suppliers and other stakeholders who are affected by this temporary suspension. We regret the difficulty this will cause them, as well as our employees, but it’s vital to maintain health and safety for all those who support our products and services and to assist in the national effort to combat the spread of COVID-19.”

Puget Sound area-based employees who can work from home will continue to do so. Those who can’t work remotely will receive paid leave for the initial 10 working days of the suspension – double the company policy – which will provide coverage for the 14-calendar-day suspension period.

When the suspension is lifted, Boeing will take an orderly approach to restarting production with a focus on safety, quality and meeting customer commitments. This will be a key step to enabling the aerospace sector to bridge to recovery.

Navy’s Top Doctor: No Active COVID-19 Transmissions Aboard Ships Yet



The USNS Mercy will deploy to the West Coast to help with the care of patients in some hospitals that don’t have COVID-19 so those hospitals can concentrate on treating patients with the virus. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Zach Kreitzer

ARLINGTON, Va – The U.S. Navy’s top medical officer said that no COVID-19 cases have been detected on board Navy ships at sea.

"Because of those enhanced measures that were undertaken weeks ago, we have not seen active transmission," Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham, surgeon general of the Navy said, during a March 19 virtual news conference at the Pentagon. "We believe [those ships] are essentially self-quarantined in place as units."

"The small handful of cases that we have had have been in ships that are in port, Gillingham said. "Those individuals have been immediately identified, isolated and, if requiring treatment, they have been provided appropriate treatment for their condition."

The admiral affirmed that social distancing is being observed to the maximum extent possible on the ships. Analysis of COVID tests is not yet available on ships; the tests are sent ashore for analysis.

He said that everyone boarding Navy ships is being screened for the virus. As a ship leaves port, it is not allowed to make a port call until it has been at sea for at least 14 days, the incubation period for the virus.

The Military Sealift Command is activating the hospital ships USNS Comfort and USNS Mercy to relieve the burden of acute-care patients in some hospitals of patients without the COVID-19 virus so that the hospitals can concentrate on virus victims. The ships are being prepared for a 1,000-bed mission. The Comfort is being sent to New York City.

Gillingham said that the critical core crew for the USNS Mercy is reporting aboard and is being screened for the virus before being allowed on board. A decision of where to send the Mercy on the U.S. West Coast has not yet been made. The Mercy is scheduled to sail next week.

"We will be very careful in the development of our concept of operation of how to care for a community of patients [on the hospital ships]," Gillingham said. "Screening will be an essential part of that guidance."

Esper Orders Navy to Ready Hospital Ships to Take Pressure Off U.S. Hospitals



The hospital ship USNS Comfort, which is currently undergoing maintenance. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Morgan K. Nall

ARLINGTON, Va. – The secretary of defense said March 18 that he has ordered the U.S. Navy to prepare its two hospital ships for activation to take pressure off the nation's hospitals battling the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

At a Pentagon news conference, Secretary Mark T. Esper referred to the two hospital ships – USNS Comfort and USNS Mercy, based at Norfolk, Virginia, and San Diego, respectively – operated by the Military Sealift Command.

“The Comfort is undergoing maintenance and the Mercy is at port,” Esper said. “We’ve already given orders to the Navy a few days ago to lean forward, in terms of getting them ready to deploy.”

Esper said the capabilities of the two ships, like military field hospitals, are focused on trauma.

“They don’t have necessarily the segregated spaces you need to deal with infectious diseases,” he explained. “And so one of the ways by which you could use either field hospitals, the hospital ships or things in between is to take the pressure off of civilian hospitals when it comes to trauma cases [and] open up civilian hospital rooms for infectious diseases.”

Esper said that a bigger challenge than activating the hospital ships is staffing the ships with medical professionals.

“All those doctors and nurses either come from our medical treatment facilities or they come from the Reserves, which means civilians,” he said. “And, so what we’ve got to be very conscious of and careful of as we call up these units and use them to support the states, [is] that we aren’t robbing Peter to pay Paul, so to speak. So, what I don’t want to do is take Reservists from a hospital where they are needed just to put them on a ship to take them somewhere else where they are needed. So, we’ve got to be very conscious of that. As I’ve spoken to a couple governors today, we talked a little bit about that, and I think people are beginning understand what that trade-off means.”

Coronavirus Outbreak Could Have Lasting Impact on Sea Services’ Supply Chain, Official Says

WASHINGTON – In addition to imposing immediate travel restrictions on personnel and forcing U.S. Navy ships at sea to self-quarantine between visits to foreign ports, the worldwide coronavirus outbreak could be an “impacting element” on acquisition and sustainment programs, a Department of the Navy official said.

"We've been working for a long time on supply chain integrity, and so [the virus outbreak] plays into the supply chain, understanding our supply lines where we've got fragility, [and] planning forward on that,"

James Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, told the readiness subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on March 12.

Rep. John Garamendi (D-Calif.), the readiness subcommittee chairman, used his first question at the hearing on Navy and U.S. Marine Corps readiness not about destroyers or shipyards but on how the sea services are dealing with the coronavirus outbreak, which the World Health Organization on March 11 designated as a pandemic.

Marine Corps Deputy Commandant Gen. Gary Thomas said the Corps is reviewing disease containment plans, starting to restrict large gatherings, implementing measures to screen and quarantine Marines when necessary, and screening personnel in unique places "in the sense that they bring people from all over the country, for example entry level training."

Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Robert Burke said the Navy's top priority is the "well-being of our Sailors and their family members." He added that the Navy, along with the other armed services, is providing support to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), being coordinated by U.S. Northern Command.

The Navy is following CDC guidance regarding minimum requirements with implementation "above and beyond those requirements as necessary to meet the unique needs of the service," Burke said.

Ships at sea are on self-quarantine for 14 days between every port departure and arrival and are monitoring their crew for symptoms of the virus. The at-sea quarantines, first initiated in the Pacific, are now in force worldwide, Burke said. "We are very sensitive to the fact that we're moving from place to place rapidly. We do not want to be the source of transmission of the virus," he added.