Coast Guard Sees Many Uses for Unmanned Systems in the Arctic Environment

Coast Guard Cutter Healy deckhands prepare to lower an unmanned underwater vehicle, operated by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, into the Beaufort Sea during a simulated spilled oil response and recovery exercise, Sept. 10, 2013. WHOI scientists used the UUV to monitor ice conditions from below during the simulated exercise. *U.S. COAST GUARD /* Petty Officer 3rd Class Grant DeVuyst

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – First sought to extend the reach of Coast Guard cutters in the Pacific Ocean, the service is exploring the use of unmanned aerial, surface, and undersea systems in the harsh and distant environs of the Arctic.

“Numerous types of platforms could be extremely valuable in the Arctic,” U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Thom Remmers told a, exposition floor briefing Aug. 2 at the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space expo in National Harbor, Maryland.

Remmers, the Unmanned Cross-Functional team lead for the Coast Guard’s Directorate for Capabilities (CG-7), said underwater vehicles could “very easily and capably look for environmental spills.”

The Coast Guard partnered with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts to operate a 250-lb. long-range autonomous underwater vehicle (LRAUV), Polaris, developed by the institute for just purpose, he said. “It demonstrated a search for oil spills under the ice in the Arctic,” he added.

Remmers said the Coast Guard has also deployed unmanned aerial vehicles on some icebreakers, like the Coast Guard Cutter Healy, “primarily by tactical commanders to look for ice

floes," he added.

"Those types of needs are not unique to the Arctic," Remmers said, "but they're much more valuable when you start looking at access in that region." Unmanned systems could also provide "a long-range persistent MDA [maritime domain awareness] type of capability that we need up there," he said.