

# Oregon-Based Cutter Back Home After \$311 Million Cocaine Seizure



A crew member of the Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast oversees the offload of narcotics in San Diego on July 26. The crew seized more than 26,000 pounds of cocaine while patrolling the eastern Pacific Ocean. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 2nd Class Jordan Akiyama

ASTORIA, Ore.

– The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast (WMEC-632) returned home July 30

following a 56-day counternarcotic patrol to the eastern Pacific Ocean, the

Coast Guard Pacific Area said in a release.

The crew

interdicted five suspected smuggling vessels, including three pangas, a fishing

vessel and a sailboat, and the crew recovered floating bales of contraband

yielding more than 23,000 pounds of cocaine.

The Steadfast

crew offloaded more than 26,000 pounds of seized cocaine in San Diego on July

26, which was a result of the cutter's five interdictions, bale recovery and an

interdiction case by the Coast Guard Cutter Robert Ward (WPC-1130).

The cocaine,

worth an estimated \$350 million, was seized by the crews while the cutters were

patrolling international waters off the coasts of Mexico and

Central and South  
America from late June to mid-July.

"This was  
26,000 pounds of cocaine that will not make it to the main  
streets of the USA,  
and it also gives us the opportunity to make sure we can  
continue to combat  
transnational criminal organizations who transport this  
cocaine deep in the  
Pacific every single day," said Rear Adm. Peter Gautier, the  
11th Coast Guard  
District's commander. "Because we know that with a supply  
chain of illegal  
narcotics, at every single step there's violence, instability  
and despair."

Steadfast's  
seizure of more than 23,000 pounds of cocaine marks the  
largest amount of  
cocaine seized by crews aboard a 210-foot Reliance-class  
medium-endurance  
cutter during a single counternarcotic deployment in Coast  
Guard history.

Many of the  
medium-endurance cutters in service today are more than 50  
years old. The Coast  
Guard's medium-endurance cutters represent 70% of the  
service's counter-drug  
interdiction fleet. These cutters are approaching the end of  
their service life.  
Replacing this aging fleet with the offshore patrol cutter is  
one of the Coast  
Guard's top priorities. Even though medium-endurance cutters

are still highly effective, as shown by the narcotics interdictions, the ships can be difficult and expensive to maintain and operate.

As these cartels become more advanced in their methods at sea, the Coast Guard is recapitalizing the fleet with modern assets equipped to detect, interdict and disrupt the growing flow of illegal drugs, weapons and people in the eastern Pacific.

The offshore patrol cutter will provide a critical capability bridge between national security cutters like the Coast Guard Cutter Munro (WMSL-755), which offloaded 39,000 pounds of cocaine earlier this month, and fast response cutters like the Robert Ward, which seized more than 3,000 pounds of the cocaine offloaded July 26. The Robert Ward's interdiction was the first cocaine seizure made by a fast response cutter in the Eastern Pacific.

"There are few closer relationships than those among the members of a ship's crew performing a dangerous, important mission," said Cmdr. Dan Ursino, the Steadfast's commanding officer. "Steadfast's crew has worked as a remarkable, dedicated team with a strong common goal – protecting their nation from the deadly, destructive effects of illegal drugs."