

Coast Guard, CBP Interdict 23 Illegal Migrants, 2 Suspected Smugglers



Pictured are 23 illegal migrants and two suspected smugglers on a 25-foot pleasure craft approximately 10 miles east of Palm Beach, Florida, Oct. 09, 2020. Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations interdicted 23 illegal Haitian migrants and two Bahamian suspected smugglers, repatriated the migrants and transferred the suspected smugglers to CBP. Coast Guard / Petty Officer 3rd Class Matthew Huber

KEY WEST, Fla. – The Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations interdicted 23 illegal Haitian migrants and two Bahamian suspected smugglers approximately 10 miles east of Palm Beach on Oct. 9, the Coast Guard 7th District said in an Oct. 11 release.

The Coast Guard Cutter Richard Etheridge (WPC-1102) crew and a CBP AMO surface asset crew interdicted a 25-foot pleasure craft with 25 people aboard approximately 10 miles east of Palm Beach. During the interdiction, it was determined that this was an illegal migrant smuggling operation involving 15 Haitian male migrants, eight female Haitian migrants and two Bahamian male suspected smugglers. One female migrant was medevaced by a Coast Guard Station Lake Worth Inlet 45-foot Response Boat–Medium crew over the course of the interdiction.

The cutter Richard Etheridge crew transferred the two suspected smugglers to CBP for potential prosecution and repatriated 22 Bahamian migrants in accordance with federal policy.

“I’m proud of my crew and the collaboration between Station

Lake Worth Inlet and CBP AMO involved in these cases,” said Lt. Cmdr. Jane Sarnecky, commanding officer of the cutter Richard Etheridge. “They ensured the safety of all 23 migrants and two human smugglers in a fluid and dynamic environment in which migrant condition and weather quickly deteriorated. If you are considering taking part in an illegal voyage do not take to the sea, you are risking your life and the lives of everyone else aboard. The Florida Straits are dangerous and unforgiving, especially in the case of grossly overloaded and unseaworthy boats with inadequate lifesaving equipment aboard.”

The Coast Guard interdicted approximately 418 Haitian migrants who have attempted to illegally enter the U.S via the maritime environment in fiscal year 2020, which began Oct. 1, 2019, compared to 885 Haitian migrants in fiscal year 2019. These numbers represent the total number of at-sea interdictions, landings and disruptions in the Florida Straits, the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean.

Once aboard a Coast Guard cutter, all migrants receive food, water, shelter and basic medical attention. Throughout the interdiction Coast Guard crewmembers were equipped with personal protective equipment to minimize potential exposure to any possible case of COVID-19.