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## Man works to protect sea ports

SeaAway system helps screen cargo containers

BY ERICA K. DANIELS  
FOR FLORIDA TODAY

TITUSVILLE - The Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks prompted Titusville residents Stephan and Bernadette Kroecker to action.

Stephan, 55, had served in the United States Coast Guard for seven years and worked closely with the Navy. He came to worry about the vulnerability of our nation's ports.

As a commercial engineer and designer, Kroecker developed a proposal designed to scan incoming ships in a so-called "prior to port" arrangement.

The Kroeckers formed SeaAway, a private, for-profit company to develop his idea, which relies on three major components:

- A buoy system that would form an electronic boundary;
- A manned unit to monitor the information the buoy system produces;
- A means by which suspect cargo containers can be dealt with before they arrive in port.

"There are 52 major container ports in the U.S., and they are on the top of target lists according to intelligence agencies," Kroecker said.

In an interview via e-mail, Commandant of the Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen acknowledged an upswing in security concerns at American ports.

"The Department of Homeland Security and the Coast Guard have done a lot to improve the safety and security of our ports and waterways since the 9/11 attacks, including new security requirements for ships and facilities, 96-hour advance notice of arrival and increased air and sea patrols," he wrote.

"As we build out a layered maritime security posture for this country, we will work with the maritime industry, the public and Congress to further enhance security as required to keep America safe and secure."

Kroecker believes it's imperative for port security to begin long before vessels reach their destinations.

"There is really only one way to protect ports, and that's to eliminate the threat prior to it reaching the port," Kroecker said.

### ADVERTISEMENT



**Protecting our ports.** Titusville residents Stephan Kroecker, director of engineering and design, and his wife, Bernadette, owner and CEO, started SeaAway because they believe port security is vitally important. Erica K. Daniels, for FLORIDA TODAY

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The SeaAway system uses technology that would begin "interrogating" containers about 12 miles outside of the port. He is a proponent of screening all container ships that seek to enter U.S. ports.

"There is a misunderstanding in the industry about 100 percent scanning versus 100 percent screening. The World Shipping Council is against 100 percent scanning. So are we.

"What we are proposing is screening -- a precursor to full container scanning. We don't want to interfere with the flow and velocity of containers. But we need some way to validate that they are normal commerce."

Allen agrees that the nation's ports have vulnerabilities. He acknowledges that although improvements have been made, further action is required.

"An effective layered maritime security posture that pushes out our borders is essential," he wrote.

Other prior-to-port security systems have been proposed in the past. However, according to Kroecker, they were costly and suggested using taxpayers' money for funding.

"What makes us different is our business model. We're not asking taxpayers to pay for it. The consumer pays for it," he said.

The cost of SeaAway's prior-to-port security system is roughly \$100 million.

Kroecker has been speaking with various U.S. officials, including members of the Office of Science and Technology, the Coast Guard, customs, and port and harbor authorities. Additionally, he has met with representatives of Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, the Middle East and England.

"There is a huge interest. We are graduating from a company that is prototypical. We've worked out the bugs, now we need to put a working test product out there that proves the concept," Kroecker said.

SeaAway is planning to have its first proof of concept series done by September. And, it is awaiting a signed contract for two Sea Sentinels for Trinidad and Tobago. The wheels are turning more slowly, however, when dealing with American authorities.

"It's a long, drawn out process. International countries call their own shots. In the U. S., cooperation of the federal government is required.

"We have to protect the basis of our infrastructure, which is the port -- where commerce is going through. You shut down L.A./Long Beach and it's costly. Shut it down permanently and it will drag Wall Street with it," he said.