# U.S. Contiguous Zone

**Description -** The U.S. contiguous zone is a belt of sea, adjacent to the territorial sea, over which the U.S. exercises the control necessary to prevent infringement of its customs, fiscal, immigration, or sanitary laws. The U.S. may also prescribe and enforce laws against foreign flagged vessels and nationals to protect the underwater cultural heritage (UCH) to the outer boundary of that zone consistent with international law, including Article 303 of UNCLOS. Within the contiguous zone, ships and aircraft of foreign countries maintain the high seas rights of navigation and overflight consistent with international law. From 1988 to 1999, the U.S. contiguous zone was co-terminus with the U.S. 12 nm territorial sea.

**Primary Agency –** National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Ocean Service, Office of the Coast Survey.

**Spatial Extent -** 12 to 24-nautical-miles from the baseline.

**Description -** Presidential Proclamation No. 7219 of September 2, 1999, [64 F.R. 48,701 get CFR cite] in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS, art. 33.

**Official Depiction –** None at this time. In the future, the contiguous zone may appear on NOAA nautical charts.

**Known Digital Data Source –** On-line at nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/csdl/mbound.htm

**Notes -** Boundary, like the baseline from which it is measured from, may be ambulatory.

**Issues -** Offshore boundary lines are measured along an arc over the earth's ellipsoidal surface (chord length); therefore, arc distance varies with latitude and azimuth corresponding to variations in the radius of the earth's surface. As a result, the arc length must be computed (in three-dimensional space) separately for each stretch of coastline, even though the projection distance remains unchanged (Ball 1997). Many boundaries have been created using a buffer function in a geographic information system. This process does not take into account chord length or distortion due to projection and often may result in an inaccurate representation of the "envelope of arcs." Accordingly, the GIS boundary data may not accurately reflect the official or actual boundary.