

Pandemic shows need for Coast Guard's IT overhaul, top admiral says

By Sarah Cammarata

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The coronavirus outbreak is “fuel for the fire” in the Coast Guard's quest to upgrade its failing information technology backbone, the service’s top official said today.

Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz's remarks to the Navy League's virtual Sea-Air-Space Exposition come two months after [calling for a “tech revolution”](#) in order to bring the service back from the “brink of catastrophic failure.”

“I would arguably say we’ve kicked the can a bit on our IT infrastructure. And you get to a point where you can’t kick that can anymore,” Schultz said. “I need to be fielding mobility for a bright young workforce because they expect that — that’s a competitive disadvantage to not be doing that.”

Schultz cited a lack of connectivity on the Coast Guard’s national security cutters, though he stressed that the pandemic now shows “that mobility is all that more important. I think the current crisis allows us to speak into that with some different metrics of different urgency.”

He noted that although the Coast Guard’s fleet of heavy cutters aren’t essential to the service’s response to the pandemic, “this could be a different type of crisis where those cutters are absolutely more seminal to it.”

“I would say this just validates the urgency. I’ve got thousands of employees that are teleworking right now ... tens of thousands of frontline operators are still doing their job, but even our capacity to telework, where we’re making some immediate expenditures, we’ve got a little more latitude right now to attenuate that, but this is really exacerbating or showing just how critical this C5I computers, communications, all the modernization stuff, how important it is for an organization like the Coast Guard.”

He said the pandemic should add a sense of urgency to his call for a "tech revolution," which involves making sure the services’ technology is in line with industry based standards, first by moving to the cloud.

The fiscal 2021 budget request includes \$24 million for IT infrastructure. Schultz stopped short of requesting more funds for IT modernization, but he said Monday that “there’s clearly a money piece of this. It’s inside the lifelines. We’ve got to stop patching old systems, stop layering more complexity.”