



## ***Safety Lines Newsletter***

Volume 9

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### **Welcome Aboard and other News**

Welcome Aboard -

Please join us in welcoming our new Prevention Deputy Director, Sig Murphy! Sig brings to the Department significant personal, professional and Auxiliary experience. He holds the Trident device with qualifications as Asst. Harbor Safety Specialist, Asst. Pollution Investigator, Asst. Pollution Response Specialist, Marine Environmental Education Specialist, Marine Safety Administrative & Management Specialist, and Uninspected Passenger Vessel Examiner. In addition, Sig is an AUXOP, coxswain, personal watercraft operator, QE, instructor, AUX Search Coordination and Execution instructor and vessel examiner. Sig is currently transferring from District 17 to 8<sup>th</sup> Coastal. In D17 Sig has been serving as District Captain and Auxiliary Sector Coordinator for Sector Anchorage.

Please also congratulate Peter Fagley on his new position as Division Chief, Port and Facility Activities. Peter has been on staff for several years and a Branch Assistant and brings a great deal of experience to his new position. He also holds the Trident device with qualifications as Asst. Facility Inspector, Asst. Harbor Safety Specialist, Asst. Pollution Investigator, Asst. Pollution Response Specialist and Marine Safety Administrative and Management Specialist. Peter is also serving as the national representative for SONS 2010.

Other News –

DSOs-MS will be attending N-TRAIN 2010. More information will be sent to District Commodores, Chiefs of Staff and DSOs in the near future, but please mark your calendar for what plans to be an exciting, interactive training event! N-TRAIN is scheduled for 21-24 January.

At NACON in August the Department name was officially changed to the Prevention Department. The head of the Department is now known as Prevention Director. All position designations below Deputy Director remain the same. Mastheads, logos and other materials will be making a transition to the new name over the next few weeks.

# Evolution in the USCG Mariner Licensing & Documentation Program



*By Ron Doescher*

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) has statutory authority to control and administer U.S. merchant mariner licensing and documentation. Within the USCG mission structure the Mariner Licensing & Documentation (MLD) program falls under the USCG Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security, and Stewardship (CG-5) and its administration is the function of the USCG National Maritime Center (NMC) in Martinsburg, WV.

Today's professional mariner is expected to have formal training to supplement the "sea time" experience, particularly for licensing for service on vessels of 500 gross tons or greater in ocean service. International standards now apply for many aspects of professional qualification, particularly the International Maritime Organization (IMO) *International Convention on the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers* (STCW-95).

There are four types of mariner credentials issued by the USCG: merchant mariner licensees classed as either Deck or Engineering Officers, with various grades and endorsements<sup>1</sup>; Certificates Of Registry (CORs) issued for vessel staff officers such as Pursers, Doctors, and Nurses; the Merchant Mariner Document (MMD) issued as identification and with various seaman rating endorsements; and an STCW Certificate listing all international endorsements.

It wasn't too long ago that a mariner trained and worked to acquire the necessary knowledge, experience, and sea time and then went to a Regional Examination Center (REC) to file the application, get fingerprinted, take the required examinations, get an evaluation of professional qualifications, and would then receive the appropriate license certificate; it was all local. Not any more.

## **Changes at the NMC and Looking Ahead.**

The license and documentation evaluation and issuance process has now been consolidated at the NMC. The goals of the consolidation are to streamline and standardize the license & documentation services to the mariner, and to ensure that more consistent interpretations and application of the Federal Regulations and USCG policies are used. Modern process management and customer access techniques are being applied, along with measures of effectiveness that are openly shared with the customers.

There are seventeen Regional Examination Centers (RECs) located across the United States and its possessions. Until recently they had been subordinate to their local *Officer In-Charge, Marine Inspection* (OCMI)<sup>ii</sup> and the files on the mariners they served were locally maintained. As of January 1, 2009 all RECs have been assigned directly to the NMC, and all mariner files are being centrally located there. RECs still provide counter service to accept and check (not evaluate) applications for mailing to the NMC, and to take fee payments. RECs also retain their examination room service and perform mariner school oversight within their zone.

The traditional merchant mariner license certificate was an impressive 8x10 inch engraving with an embossed raised seal from the issuing REC, and now the NMC. Formal documents were also issued as CORs and STCW Certificates; the MMD was issued as a laminated wallet card.

There are some major changes to the entire MLD program that went into effect on April 15, 2009. First, the USCG will no longer fingerprint mariners for mariner license and documentation applications. A mariner will have to present the new “TWIC” (Transportation Worker Identification Credential), or proof from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) that one has been applied for, before the NMC will accept an application. Requirements for the TWIC were established via the Maritime Transportation Security Act and the Safe Port Act to serve as an identification and security vetting program for all Coast Guard credentialed mariners, and for other personnel who require unescorted access to secure areas within a port.

Second, the Coast Guard will be issuing a single passport-sized consolidated Merchant Mariner Credential (MMC) booklet for active mariners. The MMC will contain all identification, license data, domestic and international endorsements, STCW certifications, and other pertinent information (figure 1).<sup>iii</sup>

Finally, another major change is that mariners can now mail their license and/or documentation application package directly to the REC. Those submitting an application by mail must use the on-line fee payment via [www.pay.gov](http://www.pay.gov), and include a photocopy of their TWIC and a sworn Merchant Mariner Oath certificate notarized or signed by an approved government official. All forms and instructions are available on-line at <http://www.uscg.mil/nmc/default.asp>.

The Coast Guard has partnered with industry to enable training programs that directly serve the licensing and documentation process. In a sense, the Coast Guard acts as an academic accreditation agency that evaluates, approves, and regulates professional mariner courses at civilian schools. The schools for their part strive to serve the market demands of the maritime industry. Many of these NMC-approved courses involve the school administering the appropriate licensing, endorsement, or certification examinations after the required training in lieu of testing at the REC. If the mariner successfully completes the course and examinations, he/she is issued a certificate of completion by the school that is good for one year and becomes part of the license application package.

Gradually some on-line “distance learning” course offerings are being approved by the NMC, particularly for the lower-level deck licenses. Other courses, particularly for the upper-level licenses and STCW endorsements, require sophisticated simulators. Further proliferation of these courses will present new challenges to the NMC to evaluate, administer and monitor.

### **Auxiliary Service Opportunities**

For years the USCG Auxiliary has provided support to the various RECs that requested assistance. They typically served at the customer service desk, in the examination room, doing data entry, fingerprinting

mariners, administering oaths, supporting the licensing evaluation process, and supporting the mariner school oversight process.

More recently, Auxiliarists have staffed Remote Customer Assistance Offices to provide REC-like counter services to mariners.<sup>iv</sup> Most of those support functions will remain in today's downsized REC. This year Auxiliary medical personnel have augmented the NMC's medical evaluation staff evaluating the medical portion of the mariner license applications, relieving a severe backlog in the overall evaluation process flow.<sup>v</sup>

Two Auxiliary Personal Qualification Standards (PQSs) were established by the USCG and are part of the TRIDENT Program: the *Auxiliary Assistant License & Document Evaluator* (AUX-LDEV) and the *Auxiliary Assistant License & Document Examiner* (AUX-LDEX). Additionally, Auxiliarists can take other training courses as needed to supplement their local on-the-job requirements (for instance: administering oaths, fingerprinting, and forensic documentation evaluation).

Qualification to an established PQS requires self-study, on-the-job training with a qualified mentor, and meeting a review board – a significant investment in time and effort. Staying qualified requires continued review of Federal Regulations and USCG policies. These can still be obtained depending on local REC needs and policies.

Auxiliarists involved in mariner school oversight visit schools in the RECs zone to examine their course and student records, monitor classes and examinations, and to examine their facilities for safety, security, and suitability.<sup>vi</sup> Since this is a critical quality control function of the USCG Mariner License & Documentation (MLD) Program, standards are rigorous and universal.

Members interested in supporting the USCG Mariner Licensing & Documentation Program should contact their District Staff Officer – Marine Safety for opportunities in their area.

For further information regarding the USCG MLD Program visit the NMC website at: <http://www.uscg.mil/nmc>.

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<sup>i</sup> See Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations, Subchapter B, Part 10 for a full description of grades and requirements.

<sup>ii</sup> Typically one of the statutory roles now assigned to the Sector Commander.

<sup>iii</sup> The MMC will be in compliance with various International Conventions and Standards regarding machine readability and seaman's identification.

<sup>iv</sup> See the article: "*Auxiliarists of the Regional Examination Centers*", pages 97-99, in the *USCG Proceedings of the Marine Safety & Security Council*, Fall 2008 edition. [www.uscg.mil/proceedings](http://www.uscg.mil/proceedings)

<sup>v</sup> Public information release titled: "*Actions to Reduce Mariner Credentialing Process Time*" from CAPT David C. Stalfort, Commanding Officer, USCG National Maritime Center, dated February 10, 2009.

<sup>vi</sup> Mariner school oversight policy is found in COMDTINST 16721.1 and the USCG Marine Safety Manual, Volume III, Chapter 7



## News From the Prevention Outreach Division

By Mary Larsen, DVC-MW

News about the new Aquatic Nuisance Species trunk is spreading. Several districts have ordered and used it at conferences and boat shows. The response has been good, both from the Auxiliary and from the public.

If you are interested in using the ANS trunk, but not sure about the contents there is no need to request one just to check. A DVD giving complete details is available from ANSC. In addition, the Prevention Outreach webpage gives a link to the same video. Please do check out our greatly improved webpage. Thanks to the efforts of Barry Berg, it is now up to speed and offers answers to many of your questions.

Some members are still not aware of the newly designed posters for America's Waterway Watch. These are available from ANSC and offer thirteen different waterfront views from various parts of the country. The various scenes are described in the online catalog from ANSC and your materials officer can order these for you.

New AWW decals are also available. These are slightly larger than the older ones but offer the essential phone numbers on the back. Once the boater sticks the decal to the window on the boat, the phone numbers are clearly visible.

Please order and use these valuable tools to get the message out to the boating public.





## America's Waterway Watch has ready materials

There is a variety of informational and promotional material being made available by the Coast Guard in support of *America's Waterway Watch*. Much of this material will be distributed to commercial enterprises operating on or close to our navigable waterways -- marinas, retail outlets, marine dealers, etc. Coast Guard personnel will also distribute and explain AWW material during routine boardings and inspections of commercial vessels, fishing boats and pleasure craft, and in the course of presenting public education and public outreach programs.

**AWW Brochure:** A quick overview of America's Waterway Watch. Provides examples of suspicious activities. Also includes a sample form for reporting suspicious activities, along with important phone numbers.

**AWW Poster:** Attractive, colorful poster introducing America's Waterway Watch. Provides National Response Center's Terrorist Hotline number.

**AWW Wallet-size Card:** Handy informative card that slips easily into your wallet or shirt pocket. Provides list of suspicious activities and phone numbers to call if you witness such activities.

**AWW Decal:** For placement on window or windshield of your vessel or place of business.

**AWW Banner**

**Laminated Poster -- Marina Sign**

**AWW Video:** Informative and entertaining video that introduces America's Waterway Watch. Gives examples of suspicious activities and tells the public and maritime industry how to respond when they see them.

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## **MARITIME SAFETY INFORMATION (MSI)**

NAVTEX is an international automated medium frequency (518 kHz) direct-printing or paperless service for delivery of navigational and meteorological warnings and forecasts, as well as urgent marine safety information to ships. It was developed to provide a low-cost, simple, and automated means of receiving this information within approximately 200 nautical miles of shore. The U.S. Coast Guard operates NAVTEX stations in the U.S. There are no user fees associated with receiving NAVTEX broadcasts. A NAVTEX receiver provides important information and is a useful radio to have on your boat.

NOAA weather radio network provides voice broadcasts of local and coastal marine forecasts on a continuous cycle.



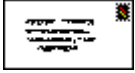
## **SATELLITE EPIRB'S**

The most useful system for automated distress alerts is the 406 MHz Electronic Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB). It provides rapid alerting, identification (if properly registered), and accurate location to search and rescue authorities. The EPIRB has a built in homing beacon on 121.5 MHz. USCG aircraft have the ability to home on this signal. This is an important safety device and can be purchased or rented.



## **CELLULAR PHONES ARE NOT RECOMMENDED**

Cellular phones generally cannot provide ship-to-ship safety communications or communications with rescue vessels. If you make a distress call on a cellular phone only the one party you call will be able to hear you and none of the boats in your immediate vicinity will know you are in trouble. Locating a cellular caller is hard to do. If you don't know precisely where you are, the Coast Guard will have difficulty finding your location on the water. Use your DSC VHF radio.



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Frank Larkin, the Navigation Systems Division Chief (DVC-MN) receives questions from members across the nation. The following is one with an informative reply:

## Letter to Frank Larkin:

You claim under item "GPS headings and bearings" that "If magnetic, you will need a copy of the OPFAC's Deviation Table." This is, I think, not true.

Please consider that the GPS is factoring in magnetic *variation*. The table from the OPFAC is supplying *deviation*. The GPS has no knowledge of any local magnetic anomalies such as those produced by the boat and its equipment. The information from the satellites is not changed by these local magnetic fields.

Clearly, the piece of information that the user needs to have to convert between magnetic and true heading is the *variation* in the area of the GPS receiver. There is no impact to the GPS from *deviation*.

Please either help me understand by further explaining your statement, or issue a correction. It is important to start issuing such corrections. If the information was important enough to publish, it needs to be corrected if there is a problem. ~ Bruce Clarkson

## Mr. Larkin's reply:

The point that I am making is that when you are reading magnetic bearings you will need to use the deviation table for the ship's compass in order to convert any compass bearings to true in order to plot them on a NOAA chart. The time to get the table is before you get underway. In certain situations, if bearings are needed during a charting exercise while on the ATON patrol, compass bearings which taken with the ship's compass would have to be converted to true in order to plot them on a NOAA chart. It is just a precaution.

Personally, I was accustomed to using an electronic deviation self-correcting compass on my OPFAC that provided readings in True until last year when I converted to a new analog compass. The type of bearings that I usually run into during a chart updating exercise requires the use of a compass; however, I find it hard to take accurate bearings on a 25 footer with any kind of wave action. I would much rather take fixes at my location and extract a fix off the chart for the object and then use the "Vertical/Horizontal Error Calculator" that is on the Chart Updating web page to calculate the distance and bearing at True to the object for my reports. However, I always suggest that we ask for a deviation table in advance just in case it is needed to convert a magnetic compass bearing to true when completing a final report later.

Best regards,

Frank Larkin  
DVC-MN