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FM COMDT COGARD WASHINGTON DC//G-OCS//
TO AIG 4980
COMDT COGARD WASHINGTON DC//G-AWP/CG-11/CG-45//
BT

UNCLAS //N10470//

SUBJ: DEFENDER CLASS SAFETY ADVISORY (RBS-001-06)

1. PURPOSE: THE PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE IS TO ALERT BOAT FORCES UNITS OPERATING DEFENDER CLASS BOATS OF THE POTENTIAL FOR INADVERTENT EXTENSION OF SEAT BELTS.

2. BACKGROUND:

A. A MISHAP INVOLVING A DEFENDER B-CLASS (RB-S) BOAT RESULTED IN TWO CREW MEMBERS RECEIVING INJURIES AFTER THEIR SEAT BELTS PAID OUT SLACK AS THEY WERE JOLTED FROM THEIR SEATS DURING A HIGH SPEED TURN. THE TWO CREW MEMBERS WERE BELTED IN THE PORT SEATS WHEN THE COXSWAIN MADE A HARD TURN TO PORT AT 30 KNOTS WITH THE ENGINES TRIMMED OUT. THE COMBINATION OF THE HIGH SPEED TURN AND TRIMMED OUT ENGINES CAUSED THE BOAT TO HOOK A CHINE, RESULTING IN THE CREW MEMBERS SEATED ON THE PORT/INBOARD SIDE OF THE TURN TO BECOME DISLODGED FROM THEIR SEATS. THEIR SEAT BELT TENSION SLACKENED, CAUSING BOTH CREW MEMBERS TO FALL IN THE CENTER AISLE WHILE DANGLING FROM THEIR SEAT BELTS. FOLLOWING THIS MISHAP, THE UNIT REPORTED THAT THE SEAT BELT TENSION LOCKING DEVICE DID NOT PERFORM UNIFORMLY DEPENDING ON WHAT SIDE IT IS LOCATED ON, WHICH MAY HAVE RESULTED IN INADVERTENT SLACKING OF THE SEAT BELTS. THE MISHAP RAISED CONCERNS OVER THE AMOUNT OF LATERAL PROTECTION THE SEAT BELT AFFORDS, PARTICULARLY IN THE REAR SEATS.

B. IMMEDIATELY AFTER NOTIFICATION OF THE MISHAP, THE OFFICE OF BOAT FORCES REQUESTED BOAT FORCES CENTER (BFC) YORKTOWN EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SEAT BELT TENSIONING DEVICE. TEST RESULTS WERE INCONCLUSIVE AS BFC WAS UNABLE TO REPLICATE A SITUATION WHERE THE SEAT BELT SLACKENED, REGARDLESS OF WHICH SIDE THE SEAT BELT TENSIONER DEVICE WAS ON. THE EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURER CONFIRMED THAT THE SEAT BELT TENSIONING DEVICE FUNCTIONS PROPERLY ON EITHER THE INBOARD OR OUTBOARD SIDE OF THE PLATFORM.

3. ACTION:

A. BASED UPON BFC'S EVALUATION AND THE SEAT BELT MANUFACTURER'S INPUT, NO CHANGES TO THE INSTALLATION CONFIGURATION OF THE EXISTING SEAT BELT IS REQUIRED OR RECOMMENDED AT THIS TIME. FURTHERING TESTING AND EVALUATION WILL BE CONDUCTED.

B. THE OFFICE OF BOAT FORCES WILL ISSUE AN ENGINEERING CHANGE FOR THE INSTALLATION OF SEAT BELTS ON THE REAR BENCHES OF THE DEFENDER A-CLASS BOATS (RB-HS). THE RB-S PRO HAS FINALIZED INSTALLATION INSTRUCTIONS FOR THESE SEAT BELTS AND THE ENGINEERING CHANGE PROPOSAL IS UNDER FINAL REVIEW. UNITS OPERATING DEFENDER A-CLASS BOATS CAN EXPECT THESE SEAT BELTS AND ASSOCIATED HARDWARE TO BE FREE ISSUE SHORTLY AFTER THE FIRST OF THE YEAR.

C. THE OFFICE OF BOAT FORCES IS AGGRESSIVELY WORKING TO IDENTIFY A REPLACEMENT SEAT BELT FOR THE DEFENDER CLASS BOAT. REQUIREMENTS OF THE NEW SEAT BELT WILL INCLUDE AN EASIER RELEASE MECHANISM THAT CAN BE OPERATED WITH A GLOVED HAND AND POSITIVE MANIPULATION TO ADJUST/RELEASE TENSION. TWO SEAT BELTS CURRENTLY BEING TESTED BY BFC OFFER WIDER WEBBING, HEAVIER DUTY TENSIONING DEVICES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE OCCUPANT, AND RELEASE WITH A ROTATING MECHANISM AND LIFT LATCH. THE OFFICE OF BOAT FORCES IS ALSO EXPLORING WAYS TO IMPROVE HOW SEAT BELTS ATTACH TO THE REAR SEATS OF THE DEFENDER B-CLASS BOATS, AS THE EXISTING CONFIGURATION ALLOWS THE SEAT BELT TO SLIDE BETWEEN THE SEAT BOTTOM AND BACK REST.

D. THE OFFICE OF BOAT FORCES IS AGGRESSIVELY WORKING TO OUTFIT DEFENDER CLASS BOATS WITH A MORE SECURE RESTRAINT SYSTEM. THIS WILL TAKE CONSIDERABLE RE-ENGINEERING AND TIME TO DEVELOP.

E. COMMANDING OFFICERS/OFFICERS IN CHARGE SHALL REVIEW UNIT POLICY ON WHEN SEAT BELTS ARE REQUIRED TO BE WORN AND HIGH SPEED AGGRESSIVE MANEUVERING.

F. COMMANDING OFFICERS/OFFICERS IN CHARGE SHALL CONDUCT TRAINING ON HOW TO PROPERLY WEAR SEAT INSTALLED SEAT BELTS. DURING THIS TRAINING, CREW MEMBERS SHOULD BE REMINDED THAT WHEN SEAT BELTS ARE WORN, THEY SHOULD SIT FIRMLY IN THEIR SEATS, WITH THE SEAT BELT WORN SNUGLY ACROSS THEIR LAP.

G. COMMANDING OFFICERS/OFFICERS IN CHARGE SHALL REMIND THEIR COXSWAINS THAT WHEN IT IS NECESSARY TO CONDUCT A HIGH SPEED TURN, THEY SHALL ANNOUNCE THE TURN IN ADVANCE. THEY SHOULD ALSO BE REMINDED TO CHECK TO ENSURE THEIR SEAT BELTS ARE PROPERLY WORN IF REQUIRED.

H. COMMANDING OFFICERS/OFFICERS IN CHARGE SHALL REVIEW WITH CREW MEMBERS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MISSION REQUIRED TACTICAL MANEUVERS AND MAKING UNWARRANTED DRAMATIC MANEUVERS AT EXCESS SPEED, AND THE NEED TO TRIM IN WHEN MAKING HIGH SPEED TURNS.

4. NO SINGLE PIECE OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT WILL COMPLETELY ELIMINATE THE RISK OF PERSONAL INJURY THAT CAN RESULT WHEN MAKING AGGRESSIVE MANEUVERS AT HIGH SPEED. A COMBINATION OF PPE AND PRUDENT, RESPONSIBLE BOAT HANDLING IS REQUIRED TO PREVENT INJURY. SEAT BELTS AND OTHER PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT WORK TO REDUCE INJURY. THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT INJURIES IS TO OPERATE THE BOAT IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY AND PROCEDURES, FOLLOW THE RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS, AND OPERATE RESPONSIBLY.

5. POC: LT [REDACTED] (COMDT (G-OCS-2)) AT [REDACTED], CWO [REDACTED] (BFC YORKTOWN) AT [REDACTED], MR. [REDACTED] (COMDT (G-AWP)) AT [REDACTED], CWO [REDACTED] (ELC) AT [REDACTED].

6. CAPT SCOTT W. ROBERT, CHIEF, OFFICE OF BOAT FORCES, SENDS.

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