

CG-5434?!?

The Mariner Credentialing Program Policy Division.



by LT THOMAS PEQUIGNOT

U.S. Coast Guard Mariner Credentialing Program Policy Division

Months after the National Maritime Center (NMC) closed its doors in Arlington, Va., CDR Scott Budka gets off the Metro at L'Enfant Plaza and takes the daily 10-minute shuttle ride to the Transpoint Building in Washington, D.C., home of Coast Guard headquarters. CDR Budka just recently transferred to the mariner credentialing program policy division from his previous job at the office of investigations and analysis, where he was the suspension and revocation and administrative clemency program manager.

After scanning his ID badge through the usual headquarters security corral and navigating through the maze of elevators and corridors, he finds his temporary office space in the back of a cubicle farm of new and overflow HQ staff. Looking at the faded blue carpet and the reused cubicle furniture, one could think,

"What happened to the plush office with a view above the Ballston Mall?"

CAPT David Kranking, the former division chief explains, "Separating program policy from NMC's process of evaluating mariner applications is just the right thing to do. NMC's challenge is to complete the realignment of the 17 regional examination centers (RECs) under its control, and establish efficiencies and consistency in the processes of providing credentialing services to merchant mariners. The program policy division will support this objective by providing the reg-

ulatory and policy/guidance tools. This separation will help ensure industry's needs are met."

With NMC divesting itself of the policy responsibilities and moving them to the mariner credentialing program policy division, headquarters personnel can focus anew on these important policies.

Policy Functions

While the decision to establish the policy division at HQ came later in the Restructuring and Centralization project planning (approved in April 2007), it seemed like a natural evolution.

In fact, this is not the first time the policy function has called HQ "home." Approximately a year after being created as a separate command in Arlington, the NMC inherited the policy responsibilities from HQ in 1996. This was an effort to consolidate policy and program management all under one house. However, the fact that issuing policy remained a HQ function contributed to inconsistencies within the program and difficulties in publishing needed guidance. It was decided a decade later that the mariner licensing and documentation (MLD) program would benefit if the policy function did not follow the NMC as it continued to move westward to West Virginia.

In addition, having the policy division at HQ helps maintain the integrity of the appeal process. The former appeals system had local officer in charge, marine inspections decisions reviewed by the district commander, and then by NMC, which took final agency ac-



tion. With NMC focused on the process, and under centralized operations making decisions on mariner applications, it had to have its final agency action authority removed. That authority now resides with the director of prevention policy, for whom the mariner credentialing program policy division works.

Under the director of prevention policy (CG-54) are several offices, including the office of vessel activities (CG-543). The mariner credentialing program policy division (CG-5434) is one of four divisions within the office; the others manage vessel inspections and fishing vessel safety. CG-5434 develops program policy and overall management for the MLD program. This overarching mission incorporates several functions, such as:

- Reviewing NMC's performance in the areas of customer satisfaction, process cycle time, security, efficiency, and consistency.
- Playing an active role in the review committee that oversees STCW compliance at the maritime academies through quality standards system audits.
- Making revisions to the major rewrite of the Marine Safety Manual, Volume III (Marine Industry Personnel).
- Serving as one of the key Coast Guard representatives for maritime training institutions, maritime unions, and other organizations.

Transportation Worker Identification Credential

The Coast Guard has a pending regulatory project related to the implementation of the TWIC in the maritime sector.

You should keep well informed of the requirements, implementation schedule, and application process to obtain a TWIC.

All holders of merchant mariner credentials will be required to obtain a TWIC from the Transportation Security Administration.

After the implementation date, you may not operate under the authority of a mariner credential without a valid TWIC, and failure to obtain or hold a TWIC may serve as the basis for suspension or revocation of the mariner credential.

Information pertaining to the TWIC may be found at www.tsa.gov/twic.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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- Commenting on a variety of issues associated with mariner security, including the transportation worker identification credential (TWIC).

Upcoming Initiatives

Moving forward in its inaugural year at HQ, the mariner credentialing program policy division will be taking on several high-profile issues, including managing regulatory updates and establishing the merchant mariner medical advisory committee (MMMAC). The most noteworthy of the regulatory initiatives is ensuring U.S. licensing compliance with STCW and implementation of the combined merchant mariner credential (MMC). The combined MMC will benefit the mariner by reducing the number of credentials mandated by U.S. regulation, merging them into a single identification and qualifications credential.

The mariner credentialing program policy division will also be facilitating TWIC implementation and the integration of the application and data exchange processes between the Coast Guard and the Transportation Security Administration. This will allow mariners to conduct MMC transactions through the mail.

About the author:

LT Thomas Pequignot has served in the U.S. Coast Guard for seven years. LT Pequignot has served in many capacities, including deck watch officer aboard CGC Sassafras, search and rescue command center supervisor, and admiral's aide in District Eleven.