

Coast Guard Disability Evaluation System

Frequently Asked Questions

By the Disability Attorneys of CG-LMA (Office of Member Advocacy)

1. **What is IDES?** The Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) is a joint CG and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability evaluation process. Under this system, the CG determines whether ill or injured servicemembers are fit for continued military service, and the VA assigns the appropriate rating for all service-connected conditions. Members found fit for duty continue their military service. Members determined to be unfit for duty are either separated or retired, and receive a single set of disability ratings to determine the appropriate level of CG and VA disability benefits. Integration with the VA provides medically separated or retired veterans timely access to their VA Benefits. Because the member completes the VA claim process as part of IDES, there is no need to submit a separate VA claim.
2. **What are the steps in the process?** IDES has three main phases:
 - **Medical Evaluation Board (MEB):** The MEB is the medical phase of the IDES process. The MEB consists of referral into the process (usually by the member's PCM), VA claim and exams, and determination of which conditions affect the Service member's fitness for military duty.
 - **Physical Evaluation Board (PEB):** The PEB is the personnel phase of the IDES where the Coast Guard determines a Service member's fitness for duty. The PEB phase consists of an informal board, receipt of disability ratings, and the Coast Guard's recommendation disposition. In cases where the member does not agree with the informal board's findings, this phase may also include a formal board.
 - **Transition:** Service members found fit will return to duty. Those found unfit will be either separated or retired.
3. **What is a PEBLO?** A Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Officer. These are CG members stationed at PSC-PSD-med at CGHQ. They help guide the member's case through the IDES.

4. **What is the MSC?** The Military Service Coordinator works for the VA, and helps the member make his or her VA claim and schedule VA exams.
5. **What are VA C&P exams?** Compensation and Pension Exams. These help the VA identify service-connected medical conditions and assign VA disability ratings. These are often conducted by contractors, and may be done using telemedicine. The goal of these exams is not to diagnose or treat your conditions, but just to get a snapshot of your symptoms and their severity at the time of rating.
6. **How long is this going to take?** On average, it will be nine months from when your file is checked in at PSC-PSD-med to when you are separated or retired. This time is just an estimate and may vary.
7. **When do I have a say in this process?** There are several points at which you will have the opportunity to have input. During the MEB Phase, you will have the opportunity to submit a rebuttal and/or to request impartial medical review. During the IPEB phase, you will have the opportunity to submit a rebuttal and/or a VA rating reconsideration request. Your attorney will prepare and submit these on your behalf, with your input.
8. **What is the difference between the VA and CG ratings?** The VA will identify and rate medical conditions that the VA determines were incurred or aggravated in service. The CG will only use the ratings for those conditions that cause you to fail retention standards (in other words, the conditions that prevent you from doing your job). Therefore, most of the time, the total VA rating is higher than the total CG rating, because the VA is rating more individual conditions.
9. **What is my attorney's role?** Your assigned CG-LMA attorney works for you and only you. Your attorney will help you understand the process and will be your advocate at each step. When there is the opportunity for input, your attorney will prepare written legal memoranda on your behalf. Your attorney may ask you to write a personal statement or to help gather additional documentation to support these submissions. All communications with your attorney are confidential.

10. **I have heard that if I have 18 years of service, I will be allowed to stay until I reach 20 years of service; is this true?**

Not necessarily. If you are not fit for duty, the CG may medically separate or retire you, even if you have 18 or 19 years time in service. If, however, you are still able to perform some work using your CG training, and can work without putting yourself or others at risk, you may request that EPM or OPM allow you to remain in the service until you reach 20 years. The decision will be based on your particular case and the needs of the service. You will need a strong command endorsement. There are additional provisions for members in aviation rates.

11. **I already have 20 years of service; can I just retire?** Possibly. It will be up to OPM, EPM, or RPM (as applicable) and will depend on your condition and when you wish to retire. You should discuss this with your attorney. There may be reasons to proceed through IDES even if you are retirement-eligible.

12. **I've heard that you don't get both CG disability pay and VA disability compensation, but that you have to pick one. Is that right?** For members with fewer than 20 years of service, any amount of CG disability severance or retired pay is reduced by the amount received from the VA. For many members, this means they wind up receiving VA disability compensation only, but every situation is different. Members who are medically retired are also eligible for the other benefits of retirement, including Tricare for themselves and dependents.

13. **What is Combat-Related Special Compensation?** Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) is an additional benefit available to some medical retirees, if their condition was caused by certain kinds of hazardous service. The service does not necessarily need to involve actual combat. Your attorney can help determine whether you may be eligible. While the Physical Evaluation Board will make a finding as to whether a condition is combat-related, retirees will need to submit a separate application for CRSC after they are retired.

14. **I am a Reservist and have a lot of Reserve-specific questions; who can help?** Our attorneys are experts in Reserve personnel policy and how the Disability Evaluation System works for Reservists. They will be able to answer your questions or help you find answers.