

Best Practices

*Here Are Steps **Companies** Can Take to Better Navigate the U.S. Coast Guard Credentialing Process*

The following best practices were compiled by The American Waterways Operators based on the experience of member companies. These best practices can assist companies in working with their mariners and with the Coast Guard's National Maritime Center to make the credential application and renewal process less confusing and ensure that their mariners' applications are processed as efficiently as possible.

I. SUPPORT YOUR MARINERS

Most mariners only deal with the NMC once every five years and find the process confusing and intimidating.

- Designate a person in your company who can act as a resource for your mariners and a liaison with the NMC.
- Clearly describe necessary competencies, including physical demands of the job, in position descriptions.
- Educate mariners on what they need to do when applying for or renewing a credential, then stand by to help.
- Encourage mariners with known medical conditions to complete the testing and provide the information required by the Coast Guard along with their application. This will reduce the likelihood of a response from the NMC requesting additional information from the mariner.
- Offer to review a mariner's application before it goes to the NMC. The most common causes of credential processing delays are incomplete or improperly completed applications.
- Foster a policy of open communication and trust. Encourage your mariners to sign a third-party release allowing you to work with the NMC on their behalf, especially when they are on board the vessel.

II. FOSTER A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COAST GUARD

Treat the Coast Guard as a partner, not as an adversary.

- Take the time to understand the Coast Guard's credential application and appeals process so you can advise your mariners appropriately, and develop an understanding of relevant Coast Guard regulations.
- Take advantage of opportunities to meet and build relationships with NMC staff. The NMC has representation at many industry events throughout the year, and encourages direct outreach from their customers.
- Visit the NMC website (www.uscg.mil/nmc) often and sign up for the Mariner Medical listserv to receive the latest updates from the NMC. To subscribe to this and other available lists, go to <http://cgls.uscg.mil/groups.php>. To contact the NMC Mariner Information Call Center, dial 1-888-427-5662.

III. **PROMOTE MARINER WELLNESS**

Adopting company policies that foster a culture of health and wellness will help your mariners retain their credentials and navigate the renewal process more efficiently.

- Develop an education program to promote healthy living beginning with employees in entry level positions.
- Consider modifying your benefits plan to cover the costs of preventative medical procedures and tests.
- Provide resources and incentivize cooks to prepare healthy meals.
- Consider requiring mariner physicals more frequently than once every five years as a matter of company policy. Early awareness of a medical issue that may complicate the renewal of a mariner's credential can provide critical lead time to address the issue.
- Establish a relationship with a reputable medical practice (or several such practices in different parts of the country).
- Get legal advice on how to ensure your company is kept informed about pertinent mariner medical issues, including medical waivers.

For more information on the AWO Working Group on Mariner Licensing & Medical Standards, please contact Jennifer Carpenter or Brian Vahey at (703) 841-9300, extensions 260 and 251, respectively, or via email at jcarpenter@vesselalliance.com or bvahey@vesselalliance.com.