



CEMS: Ask the Pioneers

Have you thought about implementing the Crew Endurance Management System (CEMS) at your company? Do you have questions about how to get started?

One of the best ways to learn about CEMS implementation is from those companies that are actually doing it. In a panel forum at the AWO 2006 Fall Convention, senior representatives from seven AWO carrier member companies shared their experiences, successes, and “lessons learned” from implementing CEMS in their organizations.

AWO is committed to helping all members to understand and achieve the benefits of CEMS. By sharing their experiences, members can help each other to improve the quality of life of their crewmembers and the reliability of their operations.

How did you get started with CEMS?

CEMS is really nothing more than trying to do the right thing for your employees and helping them to do the right thing for themselves. We started with physical changes – reducing noise, reducing vibration, and improving lighting conditions. These physical changes were far easier to accomplish than dietary or life-style changes, and they provided tangible evidence that we were serious about CEMS. –Mark Knoy, MEMCO Barge Line

Would you do anything different?

Education, education, education! Education remains the key in implementing CEMS. Legislating the way someone lives and works has had very limited success. It’s important to get the buy-in from a whole team of “true believers” to implement a change in human behavior that has been engrained for decades. –Walter Blessey, Blessey Marine Service, Inc.

Bring more Coaches on staff early. We had very limited resources because we are in a growth stage for our fleet. If we could have done anything differently, we would have had more educators in our fleet to promote early buy-in. –Fred Nyhuis, Marathon Petroleum

What was the most challenging thing about implementing CEMS?

The most challenging aspect of the CEMS implementation process is the need to change attitudes. Changing someone’s attitude is a real challenge. –Mark Knoy, MEMCO Barge Line

Education remains the key as legislating the way someone lives and works has limited chance of success. –Jim Farley, Kirby Corporation

What is the most effective element of CEMS?

Vessels were chosen based on the open mindedness of the crews and willingness to try something new. We basically decided to choose our battles wisely. We felt that these individuals would give the program a chance, give honest assessments, constructive criticism and useful suggestions. –Walter Blessey, Blessey Marine Services, Inc.

That is hard to say, but our cooks are certainly a key element. We decided to provide CEMS coach's training to every cook. The Captain runs the vessel, but when it comes to lifestyle – what to eat, when to exercise – the cooks are very influential. –Mark Knoy, MEMCO Barge Line

Members with day-only operations sometimes ask how CEMS applies to them since their crews don't sleep on the boat. What kinds of things have you done as a harbor tug operator in your CEMS program?

There are a lot of options for day boat operators when implementing CEMS. We have effectively added noise and light dampening insulation, relocated excessively loud equipment, and refurbished crew exercise rooms. Outside of the vessel, we've held classes and distributed information on various topics relevant to CEMS. For example, we've talked about sleep hygiene, personal choices and scheduling, and the effects of diet and caffeine on health and sleep. In some cases we have even rescheduled crew working hours to assure longer blocks of uninterrupted time ashore. Together, all of these changes have really added to the quality of life aboard our vessels. –Ned Moran, Moran Towing Corporation

Members sometimes question whether CEMS is really an inland-focused program. How has it worked for you as a coastal operator?

CEMS is important for everyone regardless of where they operate. It doesn't matter if you are an inland or coastal operator. CEMS is far more than just changing watch schedules; it benefits the health of every employee. Even more, most coastal operators are already operating on 4- or 8-hour watch systems because they are traveling such long distances. The other changes are easy fixes. CEMS benefits everyone involved. When a company makes changes to benefit the mariners, the company looks good in the eyes of the customer. Who wouldn't want that? –Jim Sweeney, Penn Maritime

What kind of reaction did you get from crews when you first introduced CEMS?

There are always a few dissenters, but the overall reaction has been very positive – probably for three reasons. First, we worked very hard to educate the workforce on CEMS: internal publications, safety meetings, vessel visits, etc. We worked equally hard to dispel the idea that CEMS required a change in watch schedules. And most importantly, we put our money where our mouth was – we made physical changes, purchased equipment, and acted upon employee recommendations. Crews continue to express support for CEMS. –Mark Knoy, MEMCO Barge Line

Have you changed your watch schedule?

We have been largely unsuccessful at lengthening the watch from six hours to seven or eight hours, although a few vessels are running a 7-5 rotation. What we have been very successful at implementing is moving the front watch to start at 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. as opposed to midnight, so that the wheelman coming off a watch is getting off in darkness and is better able to get sleep. –Walter Blessey, Blessey Marine Services, Inc.

We have boats working both 7-7-5-5 and 8-8-4-4 schedules. One of the key elements in getting the most benefit from these arrangements is the front watch being able to get to sleep before sunrise as light management is one of the physiological keys to this program. We are not yet to 50 percent of our vessels working an alternate watch schedule, but we are happy with the progress we have made. –Jim Farley, Kirby Inland Marine, LP

What has been the biggest benefit of CEMS for your company?

While still a work in progress, Kirby's efforts have paid several dividends. Included in this list would be: a healthier vessel work force due to the program's focus on diet and exercise (as well as getting adequate daily rest); improvements in the habitability of our vessels (especially in the areas of light management and sound dampening); a reduction in personal injuries and navigational incidents due to the crew members being more alert and well rested (data is preliminary in this regard, but is certainly promising); and, strengthening the working partnership with our vessel employees based on a mutual concern for their welfare. –Jim Farley, Kirby Inland Marine, LP

What advice would you give other members considering getting started with CEMS?

We think it is crucial that members obtain a good overview from an AWO member company that has had success with the CEMS program in their organization and [that] it be delivered from that company's CEMS knowledge and experience perspective. The senior executives must have a shared vision and commitment to the implementation of the program. The second key is to select the proper members to sit on the working group. The USCG CEMS ADDENDUM should be followed to properly establish the working group, and it also gives a specific outline of the role and duties of the working group. The working group must have an adequate budget to properly perform its duties. –Norb Whitlock, American Commercial Lines

Executive support is absolutely essential for the proper implementation of CEMS. Total support should be visible. Look for opportunities to demonstrate your support. Get an expert on your staff. Let that expert help develop an implementation plan that makes sense for your business. Finally, education is key – use every means available to get the word out there. –Mark Knoy, MEMCO Barge Line