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**This Month's Edition  
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### **Mark Your Calendars**

**OMSA Louisiana Golf Classic  
Chateau Country Club  
April 24th**

**OMSA Membership Meeting  
Hilton New Orleans Riverside  
April 25th**



## New Medical Rules For Mariners

**The Coast Guard may soon release its new medical guidelines for mariners.** OMSA staff and representatives from several companies attended the recent MERPAC meetings in Washington. Attendees spent three days working with the Coast Guard on the new guidelines. In the process OMSA has gained some understanding of what the changes could mean to OMSA members.

Current rules require that a mariner be fit for duty. The current guidelines are general in nature and leave large areas for interpretation. Additionally, the current guidelines do not specify the documentation required from a mariner to receive a medical waiver. The new rules will specify in detail the physical capacity a mariner must be able to perform in areas such as crawling, climbing, lifting and carrying. The new rules contain a detailed list of medications, both prescription and over-the-counter that may prompt medical waiver requirements and over 200 medical diagnoses that will require a waiver request. The advantage of the new guidance is the detail. For each condition the specific tests that a mariner must submit to the Coast Guard with a waiver request and often "passing" results are listed. The potential problem is the detail. The longer lists of physical standards, drugs and medical conditions may increase the cost of a typical mariner physical exam and lead to an increase in waiver requests.

**The draft guidelines will be released through the Federal Register with a comment period. It will be crucial for companies to work with OMSA to develop our industry consensus comments to the Coast Guard.**

## Transportation Worker Identity Card (TWIC)

The Department of Homeland Security is in the process of developing proposed rules on Transportation Worker Identity Cards (TWIC). Post 9/11, Congress decreed that every transportation industry worker would carry a national identification card and undergo a national security background check. The TWIC will be required of every person who needs unescorted access to a vessel or facility subject to security regulations. The TWIC card will serve as the official identity and security background check document for transportation workers, duplicating checks already performed by the Coast Guard for mariner credentials. Additionally, vessels and facilities may be required to purchase and use TWIC readers. These readers would be connected to a national database to provide real-time confirmation that a person's background check remains valid and that they are authorized from a national security standpoint to enter a secure vessel or facility. The possession of a valid TWIC will not be authorization in and of itself to grant access, just a step vessel and facility operators must go through before they grant access under their rules.

The Coast Guard recently reported that the formal Notice of Proposed Rulemaking is expected to be released soon. While the exact details of the program have not been released the Coast Guard reported that it expects over 200,000 persons related to marine transportation will need these cards. Significant details of interest to our industry have yet to be released such as what will the compliance deadline be, how will the government issue the hundreds of thousands of cards, will the criminal background check eliminate too many workers, etc., etc. **It will be crucial for companies to read the new guidelines and work with OMSA to develop our industry consensus comments.**

## Critical Inspector Shortage

OMSA Vice President Ken Parris met with Coast Guard officials in Washington, D.C. to discuss the critical vessel inspector shortage in the Houma and Galliano areas. In mid-March OMSA member Randy Adams, Sea Support, hosted a meeting with Congressman Charlie Melancon and the Coast Guard to discuss the critical shortage of vessel inspectors in the Houma/Galliano area. The Houma meeting was attended by the Commanding Officers of the Coast Guard units in Houma and Morgan City. The Congressman and Coast Guard promised to work together towards a solution.



The Coast Guard in Washington has committed to working with OMSA to addressing the inspector shortage. In the long-term OMSA will need help from its members collecting business data showing the growth in offshore vessel traffic in South Louisiana. The Coast Guard will use this data along with vessel inspector workload studies to determine how to best re-level their resources. This is a long-term solution. In the short-term the Coast Guard has agreed to reinvigorating the Streamlined Inspection program with an emphasis on time savings.

## **SafeGulf Deadline Reminder - May 1<sup>st</sup>**

The deadline for companies to train employees under the OMSA Safety Training Program and issue the new safety cards with the SafeGulf barcode on the back is May 1<sup>st</sup>. Chevron/Texaco, BP, Shell and Exxon/Mobil have set May 1<sup>st</sup> as their compliance deadline. Companies utilizing the OMSA Safety Training Program are requested to submit any remaining data as quickly as possible.

The deadline for initial submission of barcode data to SafeGulf data is upon us. Participation in the OMSA safety program is accepted as meeting the requirements of SafeGulf. So far OMSA has issued nearly 6000 cards to participating companies. For more information contact Ken Parris at (504) 734-7622 or kenparris@offshoremarine.org.

OMSA has heard unconfirmed reports that additional offshore operators may begin requiring SafeGulf in the future.

## **Coast Guard Bill Nears Completion**

The long-awaited Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2005 is one major step closer to completion. The House-Senate conference committee has put the finishing touches on the bill and Congress is expected to approve the bill after the Easter break.

It includes a number of provisions of interest to OMSA members. One provision would give the Coast Guard the authority to ask mortgage-holders for information that would help determine whether a foreign company is using a mortgage to control a U.S. vessel owner, in violation of the Jones Act. A second provision would only allow U.S. registry vessels to set anchors and other mooring equipment on MODUs.

A hurricane-related provision that has been followed closely by OMSA members would allow the Coast Guard to extend both inspection periods and mariner licenses that are in danger of expiring.

## **Coast Guard Finishes CEMS Study**

The Coast Guard has completed a large-scale study on Crew Endurance Management System (CEMS), an approach to fatigue on towboats. Congress requested the study two years ago, as a part of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2004. CEMS involves enlisting the vessel crew to reduce the risk factors that can lead to fatigue, such as work shift, diet choices, and stress.

For the study, a number of towing companies put their crews through CEMS training and then studied whether lifestyle changes impacted their level of restfulness. The Coast Guard evaluators concluded that "When properly implemented, CEMS is effective in reducing fatigue-related risks."

It is uncertain whether CEMS will continue as a voluntary program or will be mandated by either Congress or the Coast Guard. It was originally envisioned as a way to reduce fatigue-related incidents on towing vessels. It has been proposed that CEMS be made a mandatory part of the towing inspection program being developed by the Coast Guard. OMSA has opposed making CEMS a part of the inspection process for offshore tugs, in part because of the lack of proven results for offshore vessels. It is worth noting that the study only involved one company engaged in coastal towing and the results for coastal operation were mixed.



## **OMSA Urges MMS to Open New Areas To Drilling**

The Minerals Management Service is preparing its next five year lease plan and, as a part of that process, had sought public comments on whether to open new areas for offshore drilling. The MMS plan defines the areas that will be offered for lease over the five year period from 2007-2012. Currently more than 80 percent of the oil and gas resources offshore are off-limits for drilling and production and a number of groups representing offshore interests have been pushing for MMS to open up additional areas, including on the East Coast.

While opening any additional areas has been considered unlikely for the past several years, there is some reason for optimism this year. High energy costs and international instability have caused a renewed interest in finding additional domestic sources of oil and gas. Additionally, states have begun to study the positive impact on their local economies from energy production. For example, the Virginia legislature passed a resolution calling for opening its offshore waters.

OMSA's comments focused on the value of vessel activity that supports offshore drilling and production. The comments pointed out that OMSA member vessels result in significant property tax payments in Gulf Coast parishes in Louisiana. Contact OMSA for a copy of the association's comments. To review all comments, go to the MMS website at [www.mms.gov](http://www.mms.gov).

## **OMSA President Gives Keynote Address at Offshore America's Conference**

OMSA President Ken Wells delivered the keynote address on "Challenges Facing the Offshore Vessel Community" at the annual Offshore America's Conference. The Conference took place in Tampa on April 11-12 and was organized by Marine Log magazine.

In his remarks, Mr. Wells covered three concerns looming in the future for vessel operators. The first was the issue of security in the offshore oil and gas industry. Because of the way the security laws are currently written, vessels are allowed to enter America's offshore energy areas without meeting any of the security requirements that they must meet in order to enter any U.S. port. At the same time, U.S. vessels traveling just a few miles offshore from U.S. ports must meet stringent reporting requirements. Mr. Wells said that this approach leaves the offshore industry vulnerable to the same sort of public and Congressional outcry that was recently seen over allowing foreign companies to operate U.S. port terminals. He suggested that a simple reporting process, that allows vessels coming straight from overseas locations into offshore oil and gas lease sites to provide basic security information, would address this problem.

He also touched on licensing problems being experience by mariners and their companies. He indicated that, at a time when vessels are in high demand offshore, companies find that they are forced to tie boats to the dock for lack of qualified crewmembers.

Finally, Mr. Wells discussed the current industry build program which has caused some to raise concerns over whether the industry is overbuilding and rates will suffer. He said that there are many factors that may affect the vessel supply in the next few years, including:

- Construction schedules and the likelihood that many of the new vessels under contract will not be delivered for two years or more.
- Phase out and retirement of older OSVs, which may occur as the current offshore boom subsides.
- The fact that most new OSVs are being built to SOLAS standards, allowing them to work overseas if the U.S. market is soft.
- The potential that more areas may be opened for offshore activity in the next five years.

Mr. Wells concluded by saying that, if additional areas off the U.S. coast are opened for drilling, the gamble to build new vessels will more than justify itself in the coming years.



## OMSA / IADC Lifting And Materials Handling Conference

The 2006 Offshore Lifting and Materials Handling conference co-sponsored by OMSA and the IADC was held April 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> at Houston's Omni Hotel Westside. With two days jam-packed with information a few of the presentations stood out in the applicability to offshore vessels. OMSA members John Peleur and Mike Bell made a presentation on the principles and importance of Third Party Boarding Agreements. These legal agreements between vessel operators and the people riding on these vessels provide a legal framework for limiting the liability for personnel injuries to your employees only. OMSA has supported the industry position that these agreements should become standard. These agreements have been successfully litigated in favor of a vessel operator. A copy of a Boarding Agreement can be downloaded from the OMSA website.

John Fontenot of Seacor Marine opened the eyes of a number of participants with his presentation on injuries related to personnel basket transfer. He reported that 99.95% of all personnel basket transfers go off without a hitch, but those that do result in injuries can result in significant legal fees and litigation costs. The majority of these claims coming from third party employees of the type that a boarding agreement could protect a vessel operator from.

OMSA Vice President Ken Parris spoke on a panel debating whether offshore facility personnel should be put on vessels to conduct marine rigging or whether vessel personnel should do the work? While offshore transfer injuries are not on the rise as other areas of safety continue to improve this area has begun to stick out as an area needing attention. This panel created the greatest discussion among conference attendees of any panel. The debate will surely continue.

In his remarks Mr. Parris said that it has long been OMSA's position that the people conducting offshore cargo operations should be part of a cohesive, well-oiled team, and that the best way to ensure this teamwork is for the offshore facility personnel who work all day with the crane operator to do so, even from the back deck of a boat. That said, it will ultimately be the decision of the customer and a contract item as to who conducts the marine rigging operations. Vessels are typically crewed with the minimum personnel necessary to navigate the vessel. So, if the customer decides that the vessel will provide the marine riggers, then the customer should be willing to add sufficient funds to the vessel's dayrate to pay for the training and employment of these extra people. It may not be a problem in today's business environment, but care should be taken not to try and squeeze these people off the vessels in the next downturn.

## OMSA Golf Classic – Reminder

For those of you attending OMSA's 16<sup>th</sup> annual Louisiana golf tournament Monday April 24<sup>th</sup> at the Chateau Country Club in Kenner, LA. For more information contact Lillie, (504) 734-7622 or [lillie@offshoremarine.org](mailto:lillie@offshoremarine.org).

Check-in for the 8:00 a.m. morning tee time begins at 7:15 a.m.

Check-in for the 1:30 p.m. afternoon tee time begins at 12:45 p.m.

Breakfast - 7:00 to 8:00 A.M.      \* Lunch -11:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M.

\* Cocktails/Dinner – to start when afternoon teams finish (about 5:30 P.M.) Awards and Prizes to follow.

## April Membership Meeting – Reminder

The April 25<sup>th</sup> OMSA membership meeting will be held at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside. **The meetings will be held on the third floor in the Belle Chase, Napoleon and Versailles Rooms** with committee meetings beginning at 9:00 a.m. through 3:00 p.m., with the General Business Meeting at 3:30 p.m., followed by the cocktail reception. For more information or registration contact Lillie at (504) 734-7622 or [lillie@offshoremarine.org](mailto:lillie@offshoremarine.org).

The business meeting will kick-off with guest speaker **Rear Admiral Robert Duncan, Commander of the Eighth Coast Guard District**. Following the President's Report the special guest speaker will be **David Welch, President and CEO of Stone Energy Corporation**.



## Regulations and Issues Update

For a complete listing and update of all the issues OMSA is tracking go to the issues page of the OMSA website [http://www.offshoremarine.org/images/OMSA\\_Issues\\_Jan2006.pdf](http://www.offshoremarine.org/images/OMSA_Issues_Jan2006.pdf).

Or,

Visit the archives page of the OMSA website to review past issues of OMSA's printed newsletter and the electronic version of OMSA Online ENews at <http://www.offshoremarine.org/newsletterarchive.htm>.

## Alcohol Testing

**As of June 20, 2006 all commercial vessels will be required to carry blood alcohol testing equipment on board their vessels.** In the case of a serious marine casualty as defined in 46 CFR part 4 vessel operators are required to test for alcohol within two hours and collect drug testing samples within 32 hours. Alcohol testing may be accomplished through either breath or saliva testing. **OMSA has invited Coast Guard investigators to the April meeting to discuss the new rule and demonstrate breathalyzer testing equipment.** For additional information visit <http://dms.dot.gov/search/searchFormSimple.cfm> docket number is 8773.

## Casualty Reporting

The Coast Guard has amended its casualty reporting requirements broadening the scope of reportable marine casualties adding the new category "significant harm to the environment." Generally, all **reportable oil spills and/or chemical releases** now require the submission of a casualty report to the Coast Guard in addition to the required telephone notification to the National Response Center at 800-424-8802 or [www.nrc.uscg.mil](http://www.nrc.uscg.mil). For additional information visit <http://dms.dot.gov/search/searchFormSimple.cfm> docket number is 6927.

## Mandatory Licensed Mariner ID Checks

As of January 2006 every holder of a Coast Guard issued mariner credential (license or document) must report in person to a regional exam center for fingerprints and positive ID check, at every document renewal. Additionally, any license or document transaction that results in an extension of the validity of a document they will be required to report in person for these checks. The only current locations for this in the Eighth Coast Guard District are Houston, Metairie and Memphis.

OMSA has submitted comments to the Coast Guard requesting that portable fingerprint machines be deployed to ease this process and requested a delay in these requirements until the soon to be implemented Transportation Worker Identity Card (which will require the same process) is online. For additional information visit <http://dms.dot.gov/search/searchFormSimple.cfm> docket number 17455. Click on reverse order, the OMSA comment is number 350.

## OMSA Events for 2006

### General Business Meetings

July 20, 2006 (Thu) – Hilton New Orleans Riverside  
October 24, 2006 (Tue) – Houston (tentative date)

### Special Events

#### Fishing Rodeo

The hurricanes of last year destroyed much of Grand Isle, but they couldn't stop the OMSA Cajun Tropics Fishing Rodeo. The event will be held June 2-3 at the Bridge Side Marina. As with most of the facilities on Grand Isle, Bridge Side is undergoing major repairs but will be ready by the time the rodeo is held.

#### October 23, 2006 (Mon) – Texas Golf Tournament (Houston – tentative)



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The IVCS2000 was selected as the DP for both the Delgado and Louisiana Technical College DP Simulator systems in New Orleans and Morgan City.

They also manufacture the Beier 2000 ECMS (Equipment Control and Monitoring System). This is a state of the art interactive self-diagnostic control and monitoring system. This is also an ABS approved system.

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