The SIU in late January promoted CIVMAR safety during an important gathering in Norfolk, Virginia. This continues the year’s first joint labor-Military Sealift Command (MSC) safety committee meeting. In attendance were representatives from the SIU, MEBA and MSC, including three members of the agency’s Force Safety division and Capt. John Carter, MSC Chief of Staff. As safety concerns have grown, committee members agreed that there is a need for regular meetings of the safety committee each year. A wide range of issues were discussed at the recent meeting, including the SIU’s request to establish a subcommittee to handle emergency issues as they arise, in a timely and comprehensive manner. It is the SIU’s goal to establish a procedure to address emergencies rapidly, with all the appropriate representatives working together to investigate and resolve the situation in a way which is most protective of the CIVMAR. An informative and comprehensive presentation was provided by MSC safety representatives regarding the realignment of the agency’s safety department. Additionally, a discussion regarding the after operational safety assessment (AOSA) process was covered. The SIU urges all CIVMARS to complete the anonymous survey, if one is offered, as part of an AOSA or SMART inspection. Collection of safety data is critical to keeping everyone safe and informed.

The parties expect to meet quarterly to continue this work. The SIU has compiled a list of concerns from unlicensed mariners for the committee to address. We encourage you to send topics and concerns you would like addressed to the joint labor-management safety committee to siu@mariners.com. If you cannot reach the portal, please let the union know by writing to siu@mariners.com or contact your union representative. Union representative contact information is located on page 3 of this edition of The Federal Mariner.

If you have concerns about safety issues and need to make a report, you may contact the Force Safety team via e-mail at MSCHQ_Safety@navy.mil. You are also encouraged to contact the union with any safety concerns.

A very important part of keeping CIVMARS safe is to encourage a culture of safety. An element of developing and supporting a proactive and robust safety culture is reporting near misses and mishaps.

MSC’s safety newsletter is a quarterly publication and available to all CIVMARS. In a recent edition of MSC’s SOS Safety Newsletter, the critical topic of how to report mishaps is included on Page 5. Reporting a mishap allows the MSC Safety Force to become aware of important information; it may also protect other CIVMAR employees from similar incidents.

See the information that follows. Submit a report to protect yourself and your shipmates.

Mishap Reports: What should I submit?
An MSO aboard an AKE sent an email inquiring whether an MSC mishap form should be sent to the MSC Safety Office for an incident that recently occurred aboard the vessel. To generalize the MSO’s email, a CIVMAR was sounding a DFM tank during fueling when DFM “burped” out of the sounding tube, then...

What type of mishap report to submit to MSC Safety?
Here are a few scenarios that could have happened:
1. The sounding tube burped, sprayed some fuel on to the deck, no injury, no First Aid administered. This would be classified as a HAZREP (Hazard Report), answering the question, why did the tank burp fuel through the sounding tube? Was there an unsafe condition, or an unsafe act? Get down to the basic root cause.
2. The sounding tube burped, fuel sprayed all over the CIVMAR, but luckily the CIVMAR was wearing PPE over their eyes and they were able to get to shower before skin irritation, no injury. This is a Near Miss Report since the fuel could have gone into eyes, mouth, ears, or caused skin irritation or other complication. In the event of a Near Miss, was the CIVMAR wearing PPE, did the CIVMAR understand the potential hazards, etc.? Nearly missed being an injury.
3. If there was an injury, fuel in the eye or ingested in the mouth, if First Aid is administered then submit a First Aid report. But if an injury occurs beyond First Aid, then this is a Class D mishap (currently being added to the mishap form). Mishap reports should be full of information with the “5 Ws” answered in the narrative. All contributing causes checked off with full corrective actions being taken and any lessons learned. Let’s work beyond “loss of situational awareness” and understand why incidents happen aboard our ships.

The IRS has sent out a nationwide fraud alert. Taxpayers should be aware of a very dangerous NIE scam. The fraud continues to grow quickly. The IRS reported that there has been an increase in breaches of tax preparer computer files. Additionally, the IRS reported that once the criminals steal client data, they file fraudulent tax returns and then use the taxpayers’ real bank accounts to deposit the returns. Once the returns are deposited into the victims’ bank accounts, the criminals use various tactics to reclaim the refunds from the taxpayer victims. Different versions of the scam have been reported.

Claiming they are acting on behalf of the IRS, criminals pose as debt collection agency officials and demand that the erroneous deposit be sent to them. In another version of the scam, the victim is left a telephone message and is threatened with being charged with criminal fraud or arrest. The phone recording provides a case number and a telephone number to call to return the refund.

The IRS is urging taxpayers to be on alert and only follow authentic procedures for returning what may be an erroneous refund. If this happens to you, should you contact your bank or credit union as soon as possible because it may be necessary to close your bank account. If you receive an erroneous refund and are working with a tax preparer, contact her or him immediately.

If you file your taxes electronically and your tax return is rejected because a previous fake return used your Social Security number, the IRS recommends that you follow the process described in the publication “Taxpayer Guide to Identity Theft.”

If you are impacted by this scam and receive a fake refund it is important to review the procedures noted in Tax Topic Number 161 – Returning an Erroneous Refund on the web at https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc161

Even if you are a victim of a falsely filed return, you are still responsible for filing of paper tax returns. The return should include Form 1040X, an identity theft affidavit. Keeping an eye out for these three types of scams is especially important for employees who hold security clearances. In the Federal Mariner issue dated April-June 2015, an article stressing the importance of maintaining and protecting your security clearance is included along with tips and strategies to help federal mariners.
How to Keep and Protect Overtime, an Important Part of Your Pay

Many federal mariners spend months at sea, work in dangerous environments and sacrifice a lot to serve their country through their hard work. In addition to knowing their work makes a difference, each day, mariners can make a comfortable living by working aboard a vessel. Generally, overtime and makes up a good portion of a mariner’s at-sea wage. Union representatives are seeing an increase in mariner concerns about whether they are being credited with their accurate overtime wages. If you do not check your leave and earning statement on a regular basis, you may not know if your overtime pay is correct.

If you have a concern about shipboard supervisors denying overtime or entering overtime incorrectly into agency pay systems, it’s important that you speak out right away. SIU representatives help mariners who call for help find that employees are shipboard enforcers or an attack on their vessel, they can do to make sure they keep what they earn.

Whether you work for NOAA, SUISAN Bay – Marine, or any other maritime employer, the first step in reclaiming your overtime is to know your work rules and when your work entitles you to earn overtime as opposed to your regular wage. Generally, your entitlement to overtime is spelled out in your collective bargaining agreement. For MSC mariners, the overtime rules are located in Civilian Marine Personnel Instruction (CMI) 610. Your agency will keep records of the overtime you worked, but not all records are accurate. Make sure you check your agency’s work records at regular short intervals to see if they match up with the hours you have worked.

In years past, mariners would keep their own overtime record. Keep track of the dates and overtime hours worked. Today, it is also easy to keep these records on your phone, tablet or computer. The key is to keep track of the dates, hours and what work you performed. Mariners work hard, and you may not remember your work evolutions when it comes to check the overtime earned over a specific pay period.

Recently the union was contacted when employ- ies learned that shipboard supervisors were not paying overtime in accordance with the overtime rules. Once it is determined that there is a mistake in how your overtime pay is entered into the shipboard system, do not wait to speak out – say something as soon as possible so the mistake does not go on for multiple pay periods. Otherwise it is much harder to recoup all that money. If you are told there will be re- valuation for bringing the problem to light, remember that you have earned your pay and you and your family deserve what you have earned through hard work.

You can file a grievance, or for MSC mariners, you are able to file a grievance or a premium pay dispute.

If you feel that your complaints may not be taken seriously or that your supervisor may present prob- lems once you report discrepancies, call your union representative to get the process underway.

Historically, the SIU has fought for good wages and overtime pay over the course of its 110-year his- tory. Between 2010 and 2013 the SIU and MSC worked to negotiate overtime and penalty pay work rules, simplifying the instruction which had been in effect for 25 years. CIVMARs benefited with a clear and concise instruction which should be applied con- sistently throughout the fleet.

Only you can take the first step to know if you are being paid accurately. If you work during overtime hours as assigned by your supervisor, you are enti- lled to this money. Overtime adds up to a big portion of your wage. Know your rights, keep track of your disbursements, and don’t be afraid to speak out if you see a problem. If you need support, contact the SIU.

MSC’s Pay for Facial Hair and Use of Emergency Equipment

MSC has recently re-issued a safety policy regarding facial hair and use of emergency equipment. CIVMARs may be required to wear in the event of a shipboard emergency or attack. This includes equipment such as a self-contained breathing apparatus, emergency escape breathing device, gas masks, lifesaving and survival equip- ment, and other similar required devices and gar- ments. There was a similar policy in place aboard MSC vessels.

Currently the policy requires that any hair growth between the skin and face-piece sealing surfaces, such as a stubble beard growth, beard, mustache or sideburns which cross sealing surfaces is impermissible and CIVMARs will be asked to shave facial hair in a way that allows them to achieve an effective seal. CIVMARs should be sure they understand this policy and your rights and responsibilities if you have facial hair. The policy also addresses CIVMARs who have facial hair for religious observance reasons or medical conditions which make shaving difficult.

If you have questions or concerns about com- pliance with this policy, please contact your union representatives – East Coast: Sam Spain, East Coast Government Services Representative; West Coast: Asst. Vice President, Gov- ernment Services Unit.

Did you miss a back issue of The Federal Mariner? PDF copies of every edition are available at www.seafarers.org

Look under the News menu, then click “CIVMAR News”
Seafarers-Crewed USNS Grumman Completes Overseas Deployment

Members of the SIU Government Services Division recently helped a Military Sealift Command (MSC) vessel wrap up a lengthy, successful mission.

The CIVMAR-crewed replenishment oiler USNS Leroy Grumman returned to Naval Station Norfolk (Virginia) on Feb. 4, thus completing an overseas deployment in support of U.S. Navy and allied forces operating in the U.S. Sixth Fleet’s area of responsibility.

“The Leroy Grumman left for our deployment to the Mediterranean Sea in September of 2017,” said vessel master Capt. Kevin Tapp. “While we were deployed, the crew conducted over 30 underway replenishments at sea, providing 3.7 million gallons of fuel, 1,019 pallets of materials and provisions to U.S. Navy and NATO units from Canada, Italy, Turkey, Germany and the United Kingdom.”

As noted by the U.S. Navy, the Grumman is crewed by civil service mariners “who perform all required tasks and provide all needed support aboard the ship.”

Tapp added, “As the ship’s master, one of my responsibilities includes seeing that sailing alongside customer ships during underway replenishment operations. Our rig captains supervise at-sea fueling and cargo transfer operations alongside customer ships. The able-bodied seamen, under the watch of the lockers, assist customers and conduct safety drills.”

Fleet replenishment oliers provide resupply services to U.S. Navy and allied ships while at sea so the combatant vessels are able remain on station longer. The Grumman has five underway replenishment stations.

While on its most recent deployment, the Grumman

Mariners May Submit Medical Certificate Forms Directly to USCG NMC

Editor’s note: The U.S. Coast Guard’s National Maritime Center issued the following notice in early February:

It is linked on the SIU website in the News section, in a post that’s dated Feb. 14. The NMC website is www.uscg.mil/nmc.

To continuously improve our services to mariners, the Coast Guard has established a new option for submission of medical certificate applications (CG-719K, and CG-719KE forms). Beginning February 1, 2018, mariners may submit medical certificate only applications directly to the National Maritime Center (NMC). Regional Examination Centers (RECs) will continue to accept and review medical certificate application submissions as well.

The requirements for submission have not changed with the exception that, beginning on February 1, 2018, submissions to the NMC can be made via e-mail at D05-SMB-MEDAIP-TEAM@uscg.mil. Electronic submission requirements can be found on the NMC website.

At this time, direct submission to the NMC is only for medical certificate only applications. Applications for a Merchant Mariner Credential (CG-719B/MMC) cannot be submitted directly to the NMC. Any e-mailed application for an MMC, with or without a medical certificate application, made directly to the NMC will be deleted and the applicant will get an e-mail response with directions on how to resubmit their application(s) to an REC.

If you have any questions, please contact the NMC Customer Service Center by e-mailing IASKNMC@uscg.mil, by calling 1-888-IASKNMC (427-5662), via our online chat system, or by visiting our website.

How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy. The union’s website – www.seafarers.org – includes printable PDF versions of forms that mariners may use to request and authorize payroll deductions for labor organization dues. The forms are posted at: www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmar.asp. Forms are also available under “union forms” in the SIU membership tab.

Contact Information

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News and Views from the Nation’s Capital

President Trump Proposes 2019 Pay Freeze and Additional Cuts to Benefits for Federal Employees; Federal Employee Unions Ready to Fight These Plans

The Trump Administration released its budget in mid-February and proposed a list of cuts that would negatively impact the federal workforce across all agencies. Here’s how the proposals may impact you if they make it through a congressional review and are implemented in full:

• Pay - A pay freeze for the federal workforce;
• Pension - A cut to employee pensions by basing retirement annuity calculations on an employee’s average of their highest five years of service, rather than their last three average. This generally lessens the amount of annuity an employee will receive because during the last three years of an employee’s career, most employees earn the most money, driving their average up.
• Pension - A requirement that Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) participants pay about seven percent contributions of their salary. Currently, the contribution rate is one percent. The proposal would increase mandatory contributions until seven percent is reached.
• Pension - Eliminates the annual Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) for current and future federal retirees under the FERS program and reduces the COLA for CSRS retirees by five percent each year.
• Health Care – In an effort to shift costs to employees, the budget proposes to revise the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program and sue a voucher system to have the government cover a smaller percentage of premiums.
• Health Care – In an effort to limit health care choices, a proposal would eliminate the requirement that the Federal Employment Health Benefits Program include nationwide indemnity programs. These programs allow an employee to have the widest choices in visiting doctors or using hospitals. This program is important to employees or their family members who may have an illness which requires special treatment. This proposal would require people to move into more restrictive PPO or HMO systems.
• Leave – The budget cuts the number of days of paid leave for all federal employees and puts all types of leave into one category. This strategy eliminates the opportunity to convert unused sick leave to time in service for retirement purposes.

Other sources will verify in positions throughout the federal government.

Chet Wheeler, the SIU’s assistant vice president of Government Services, said, “The SIU will advocate in every way possible to ensure that these proposals will be eliminated from the 2019 budget. Federal mariners in ACOE, NOAA, SUISAN Bay – MARAD and MSC make sacrifices every day. They deserve to have their pay and benefits remain at the highest levels possible. The SIU will continue to work with other unions in nationwide worker coalitions to make sure these cuts don’t become a reality.”

The SIU belongs to the Federal Workers Alliance (FWA) and the United Defense Workers Coalition (UDWC), two organizations which represent hundreds of thousands of federal-sector workers. Solidarity with other unions allows the SIU to oppose these proposed changes more effectively.

Other labor unions are also watching the budget closely. Representing 156,000 employees working across the country, National Treasury Employees Union President Tony Reardon issued a statement which noted: “It appears that the administration is throwing every imaginable proposal it could gather at the civil service system and federal employees. Taken together, these proposals represent a full-scale assault on what has been a bedrock of our democracy: a civil service made up of skilled professionals who are committed to the taxpayers they serve, not the politicians.”

Other unions representing the interests of federal workers and federal retirees also weighed in on President Trump’s budget.

The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) is an advocacy group which works to protect the interests of active and retired federal employees. NARFE President Richard Thiessen issued the following statement: “This budget singles out federal workers by implementing a pay freeze, which is perplexing given the president’s continual praise of the strong economy and rising wage growth. Denying a modest pay raise during a time of economic prosperity demonstrates disdain for federal workers and needlessly punishes middle-class households.”

The Government Executive website, on March 1, 2018, reported that during a hearing conducted by the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee’s federal management panel, Senator Heidi Heitkamp (D-North Dakota), the top participating Democrat, said at the hearing it was important to “make a note about the administration’s proposed FY19 [budget] and the grave impact it would have on federal employees if it were implemented and consequently the grave impact it would have on the recruitment of federal employees.”

The “proposed threats to federal employees in the budget are numerous,” Heitkamp said, citing suggested changes to pay, retirement, health care, student loan forgiveness benefits, collective bargaining and due process rights. “There are proposals that treat federal employees in a way that I think [is] less than fair.”

The ranking Republican on the Committee, Sen. James Lankford (R-Oklahoma) commented on the pay freeze, saying, “I don’t think that gains us anything. I think it hurts us in recruitment.”

The SIU encourages mariners to study these issues closely and support congressional representatives and organizations who will advocate for you. Participation in your union protects you and your family by keeping up with ever-changing legislative efforts. The SIU keeps careful watch to make sure the interests of federal mariners are promoted by legislators in both branches of Congress.

Additionally, each year the SIU participates in the Maritime Congressional Sail-In. It’s a day-long event during which representatives from every component of the American maritime industry meet with senators, congressional representatives and their staffs to promote the U.S. Merchant Marine, American-flag shipping and domestic shipbuilding.

Noting the event’s significance, SIU President Michael Sacco said, “You all know we work in a heavily regulated industry, and that’s why we never stop speaking up for mariners and for the laws and programs that keep Old Glory flying on the rivers, coasts and high seas.”

This year’s Sail-In is scheduled to take place March 27.

For information on how to join the SIU, turn to page 3 of this issue of The Federal Mariner.