



April 12, 2011

## Actions to Improve Mariner Medical Evaluations Processing

The Commanding Officer of the National Maritime Center (NMC) has made several changes within the Mariner Medical Evaluations Division in order to improve customer service, while ensuring marine and public safety remains the priority for Mariner credentialing at the NMC. The turnover of government medical evaluations personnel, coupled with a transition to a new medical services contractor, prompted the need for customer service improvements. That transition took place over the holidays and has been completed. Vacancies, and the contract transition, resulted in increases in the inventory and cycle time to process mariner medical fitness applications.

The following additional actions were taken to address mariner concerns with processing delays, specifically related to the medical portion of the application review, and to ensure mariner applications with issues are processed in a timely fashion:

**Mariner Medical Point of Contact:** The NMC has assigned a full-time, on-call government medical evaluator to receive calls from mariners and their physicians regarding their submitted applications. This new position handles calls relating to a mariner's submitted medical fitness application and will assist both the mariner and their physicians pertaining to the mariner's application and any additional documents sent to the mariner or requested by the Coast Guard. Some cases will be transferred to the actual evaluators if they are available, or to a higher level government reviewer to further assist with technical information needed to complete the mariner's medical evaluation. When calling the mariner help desk, the mariner will be transferred to the medical point of contact for assistance. For those mariners using third-party advocates, mariners must have a third-party release to ensure privacy concerns are met.

**Increase in Government Medical Personnel:** Over the past 24 months, the Coast Guard has significantly increased the number of permanent government medical screeners, evaluators and reviewers. Some of the positions had been advertised for hire for as long as 18 months. Recently, qualified doctors and physician assistants were placed into the vacancies and are now onboard and contributing. At certain times, however, staff turnover occurs and the NMC makes every effort to quickly fill vacancies created when a government or contract employee decides to make a job change. The work for medical personnel in the Mariner Credentialing Program is primarily in the field of Occupational Health Medicine, which is an important discipline and often it is very difficult to find qualified personnel quickly. The NMC makes every effort to fill our vacancies as fast as possible within our established agency guidelines for hiring and contracting with the best-qualified personnel available.

**New Medical Services Contract:** In December of 2010, the Coast Guard awarded a new Medical Evaluations and Services contract to RGB Group Inc. of Miami, Florida. Many former employees were hired by RGB but during the transition month of January 2011 these employees took use or lose vacation time from their former company. These authorized absences were a function of the contract and needed to be completed as a part of the transition process. Adjustments to the review and processing of medical applications have been transitioned to the new contract provider and many revisions and improvements have been made to our internal guidance documents to improve the consistency of reviews.

**Adjustments to Medical Screening Procedures:** Within the past several weeks, the NMC has conducted processing reviews in the medical state of application processing *Ready to be Evaluated Medical*. These reviews have identified some measures for adjustment and alignment with the regulations and NVIC 04-08 and are already having positive impacts. Incomplete medical applications remain the single largest cause for delays. Mariners and their physicians can avoid these delays by correctly and completely providing information on medical conditions. The NMC call center can assist you with questions on medical application processing, as can the nearest Regional Exam Center. Updates will be made to the medical information on the NMC website to more clearly explain requirements and to improve our customer service in this area. Currently, however, the average net processing for mariners *without* medical issues or lower risk medical reviews remains at around 16 days. Interested parties can monitor the effect of these changes by visiting the NMC website and following the links to our monthly performance measures.

Sincerely,

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Anthony S. Lloyd  
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard  
Commanding Officer