



THE FEDERAL MARINER

MSC * NOAA * ARMY COE * MARAD

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Union Offers Key Pointers for Mariners *Proper Steps Crucial for Workers Who Sustain Injuries Overseas*

Editor's note: This article is a continuing effort by SIU Government Services Division representatives to ensure that all Federal Mariners at Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet, ACOE, NOAA and MSC are aware of what to do if you are injured at work.

It's important to know your rights and responsibilities should you get hurt at work. Most important is to know what your agency should do for you, what forms and information should be available to you and how you should receive care.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported a sharp rise in fatal work injuries among federal employees in 2013. The BLS compiles findings about workplace fatalities. In its 2013 update to the National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries it appears that fatal work injuries rose among federal employees by 19 percent in 2013. The BLS reported 124 federal employees died of work-related injuries that year.

Among federal workers who died from injuries last year, 8 percent of deaths resulted from homicides; 18 percent from roadway incidents; 10 percent from falls, slips or trips; and 4 percent from being struck by an object.

Seafaring occupations are some of the most dangerous of any workforce. Many federal mariners work and live on the vessel, some in remote medical environments. So what do you do if you become ill or injured at work?

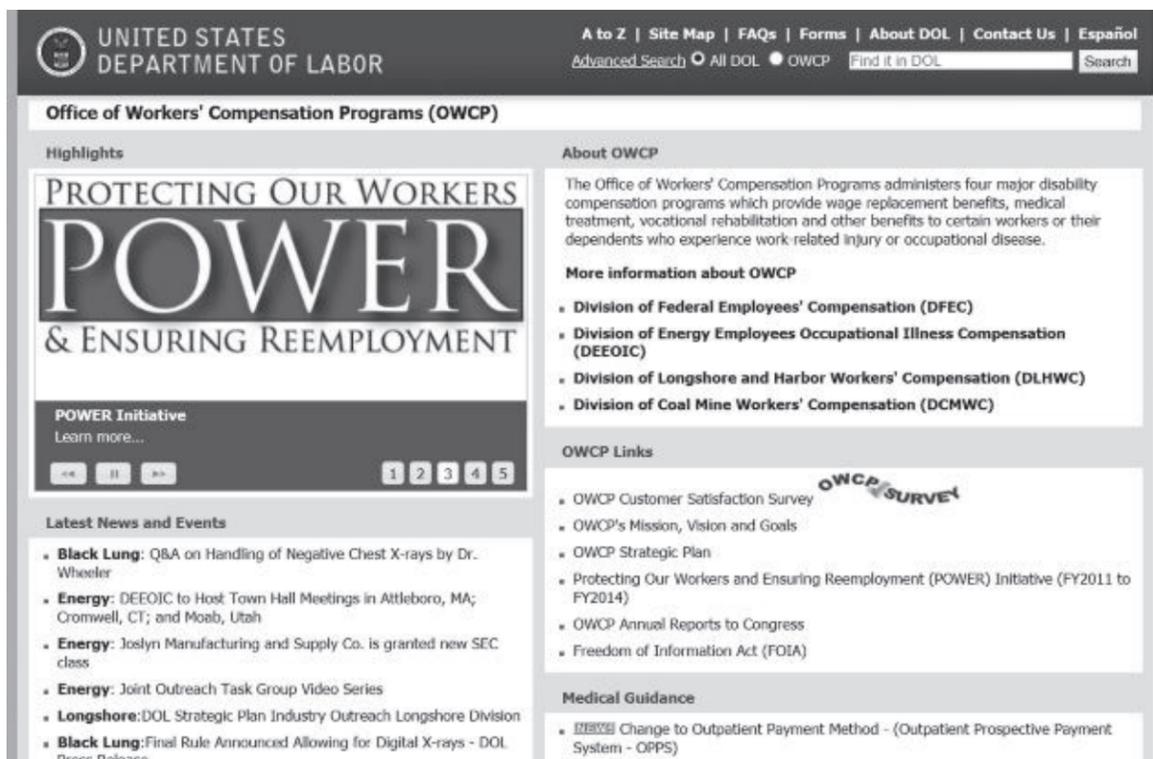
For Suisun Bay workers, close proximity to land means that generally, chances are you will be able to secure transportation to a land-based medical facility and will be able to use your FEHB Insurance at acceptable medical facilities. Suisun Bay workers who are injured should make sure that you receive your CA7 and get all the documents and reports involving your injury, and follow the general guidance at the end of this article.

For NOAA employees, NOAA has a workers' compensation contractor that handles workers' compensation claims. The contractor is Contract Claims Services, Inc. (CCSI). This company provides initial workers' compensation claims filing services to NOAA employees. CCSI can be reached at 1-800-743-2231. Further assistance may be provided by your Government Services representatives.

For ACOE mariners, if you are injured while at work call your Local District Human Resources office to ensure that you are filing the right claims forms in a timely manner. Further assistance may be provided by your Government Services representatives.

For MSC CIVMARS who are injured CONUS, like your Suisun Bay, NOAA and ACOE brothers and sisters, you will probably be in close proximity to a land-based medical facility that will take your insurance and offer the appropriate standard of care.

For MSC CIVMARS who are injured OCONUS, your situation may become more complicated. If you have been reading the *Seafarers LOG*, *Federal Mariner* and CIVMAR-GRAMS you may have learned the SIU and MSC completed negotiating



This screen grab from the DOL website shows a page with potentially useful links for federal mariners.

a revised Instruction that covers payment for medical care of OCONUS injuries and illnesses.

Not all OCONUS medical providers will accept Federal Benefit Health Insurance or an MSC letter that states you will be covered by U.S. workers' compensation insurance. CIVMARS may be forced to give a credit card for injury or illness treatment. In the event you do not have enough credit, MSC will provide a payment to the hospital – but this payment is considered as a loan to the injured or ill CIVMAR. CIVMARS will be asked to complete paperwork that makes them responsible to pay the loan back to MSC.

As for general advice, keep in touch with your agency workers' compensation representative; and document all contacts and conversations. Your union representatives can provide further guidance and information should you run into roadblocks with your claims processing efforts.

If you are injured at work, after calling your family the next call you should make is to the union. Union reps are able to help SIU members navigate the complicated workers' compensation coverage paperwork and reporting requirements.

If you are not severely injured and able to keep in touch with your agency workers' compensation representative, make sure you keep in touch on a regular basis to advocate for yourself and ensure your paperwork and claims are filed timely.

During the call and afterwards, make notes of the time and date of all conversations, whom you spoke with and a summary of the call. Make sure your family knows what to do if you are ever critically injured and that they must advocate for you.

One of the best sites you can consult to understand the federal workers' comp system is the Office of Workers' Compensation website at the Department of Labor: <http://www.dol.gov/owcp/>

Federal Employees to Pay More for Health Premiums in 2015

Federal employees and retirees, including SIU Government Services Division members, will pay an average of 3.8 percent more toward their health insurance premiums in 2015, according to an announcement from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on Oct. 7.

The hike in premiums is higher than the rise in the government's portion, which will increase by 3 percent. The employees' percentage is increasing faster because workers are choosing better plans, which require more out-of-pocket costs. Currently, the government pays about 70 percent of employees' premiums.

Overall premiums, including both the employee and government portions, will go up by 3.2 percent. That is less than last year, when they jumped 3.7 percent.

OPM officials were satisfied with the figures, noting that 2015 will mark the fourth consecutive year in which the increase was below 4 percent – the longest such streak since the mid-1990s.

"We generally feel we are in the low end of the industry average," said John Foley, OPM's director of planning and policy analysis. Foley added that private-sector estimates showed a range of 3 to 6.5 percent increases for premiums next year.

OPM officials pointed to positive market trends and the effects of the Affordable Care Act as responsible for the relatively low rate hikes. Federal employees and retirees had to pay an additional 4.4 percent toward their premiums in 2014, while the government share went up 3.3 percent. In the three years prior to 2012, premiums went up overall by more than 7 percent annually. Still, federal employee advocates were not satisfied with the 2015 rates.

Joseph Beaudoin, president of the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, made the following remarks on the increase: "The health insurance premium increase will take another bite out of the already diminished paychecks of middle-class federal employees across the country. While the 3.2 percent increase in health insurance premiums is in line with the private sector, any increase means reduced take-home pay for federal employees, who, at most, will receive a 1 percent pay raise next year."

The exact increase will vary, based on the employee's plan. The most popular option – the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Standard Option – will increase for self-only enrollees by 3.7 percent and for family participants by 4.1 percent.

Premiums in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program will have more favorable numbers, with dental rates increasing by an average of 1.7 percent and vision premiums going up by an average of 1.5 percent compared to 2014.

Enrollees in the federal flexible savings account plan will have the option to carry over a maximum of \$500 into 2016 for the first time. They will no longer have the option to spend the money in their own accounts through the March 15 "grace period," though they still have the option for their dependents. The minimum contribution will be lowered to \$100, while the maximum will be \$2,500.

In March, the OPM sent out a call letter to insurers, kicking off premium negotiations by asking providers to focus on prescription drug costs, compliance with the ACA and wellness programs.

The Federal Employees Health Benefits Program will offer a total of 257 plans in 2015, which is one more than in 2014. Four of the plans are new offerings, while 11 will be offered to all FEHBP participants.

Open Season, when federal employees and retirees can enroll in FEHBP or switch plans, will run from Nov. 10 through Dec. 8.

President's Column

House Hearing Helps Our Cause

Federal mariners are an important part of the United States Merchant Marine industry. Like your seafarer sisters and brothers who sail on private-sector vessels, your work each day supports our nation's defense strategy, scientific growth and our country's economic wellbeing.

When it comes to supporting the development of our nation's maritime policy and protecting your personal economic interests by working to secure and protect your jobs, the SIU represents every federal mariner in a variety of ways. We have teams of people supporting federal mariners and private-sector seafarers, including a group of folks that work in the political arena. Our political team is devoted to making sure your interests are heard and supported in Congress.



Michael Sacco

In late July, your interests and those of all federal mariners were discussed by congressional representatives when military and administration officials testified before the House Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces (part of the Armed Services Committee). The hearing drew a great turnout, and strong statements were made supporting the U.S. Merchant Marine by not only those individuals testifying, but

also subcommittee members from both sides of the aisle.

Make no mistake: This wasn't a pep rally. It was a hard, critical look at what our nation must do to maintain adequate sealift capability for times of war or other emergencies. In many ways, it was an overdue examination of what we've got and what we need, both in terms of manpower and American-flag tonnage.

I'm encouraged by the comments and testimony from the hearing, including detailed statements backing the U.S. Maritime Security Program (MSP) and cargo preference laws. Even more, it was heartening to hear our mariners – including the many thousands of SIU members – described as a crucial national asset.

And perhaps best of all, I appreciated the on-the-record acknowledgement that our people don't grow on trees and can't just be plucked off the street when there's a surge sealift requirement. Today's maritime industry is far different than it was a century ago or when our union was founded. We all know how different our industry has become since the Exxon Valdez accident and the September 11 terrorist attacks. Those events aren't the only reasons why the U.S. Merchant Marine is so heavily regulated, but they are major factors. As a result, it takes time and training to "make a mariner." That's one reason why it makes sense for our country to maintain programs and laws like the Maritime Security Program, Food for Peace, the Export-Import Bank and the Jones Act that help sustain the vital seagoing manpower pool.

Historically, the SIU and all of the U.S. Merchant Marine have delivered the goods, wherever and whenever needed. We've also demonstrated our flexibility and dependability when an out-of-the-ordinary assignment comes up, such as the high-profile deployment of the SIU-crewed Cape Ray sent to destroy chemical weapons. New jobs are also coming up with the new JHSV's and Mobile Landing Platform vessels that will provide our military with a flexible approach to delivering supplies and carrying troops.

I've always been optimistic about our union and our industry, but also realistic. No one is going to give us anything – not at a bargaining table, not in a legislative fight at home, not in any of the international maritime and labor forums abroad. We have to fight for ourselves, carry our own message and work with our partners from all segments of the industry to help ensure a bright future.

You, the rank-and-file SIU members, play an indispensable role in this effort by being professional and reliable on the job, by training to upgrade your skills, by helping with grassroots political action, and by supporting your union officials. That last point is important and not taken for granted. I know for sure that one of the reasons our union has been successful despite the many obstacles in the industry and government is because of continuity. It's a similar concept as not being able to shove someone up a gangway and expect them to know how to be a mariner. The political and business sides of our industry take time to learn. The relationships we've built across the military and federal agencies aren't made overnight.

As we continue working together, I remain upbeat, determined and confident that we in the SIU will do our part to keep you working aboard American-flag vessels and to keep our invaluable industry strong and growing.

Seafarers International Union Directory

Michael Sacco, *President*

Augustin Tellez, *Executive Vice President*

David Heindel, *Secretary-Treasurer*

George Tricker, *Vice President Contracts*

Kermett Mangram,
Vice President Government Services

Chester Wheeler,
Asst. Vice President Government Services

CIVMARS in Jersey

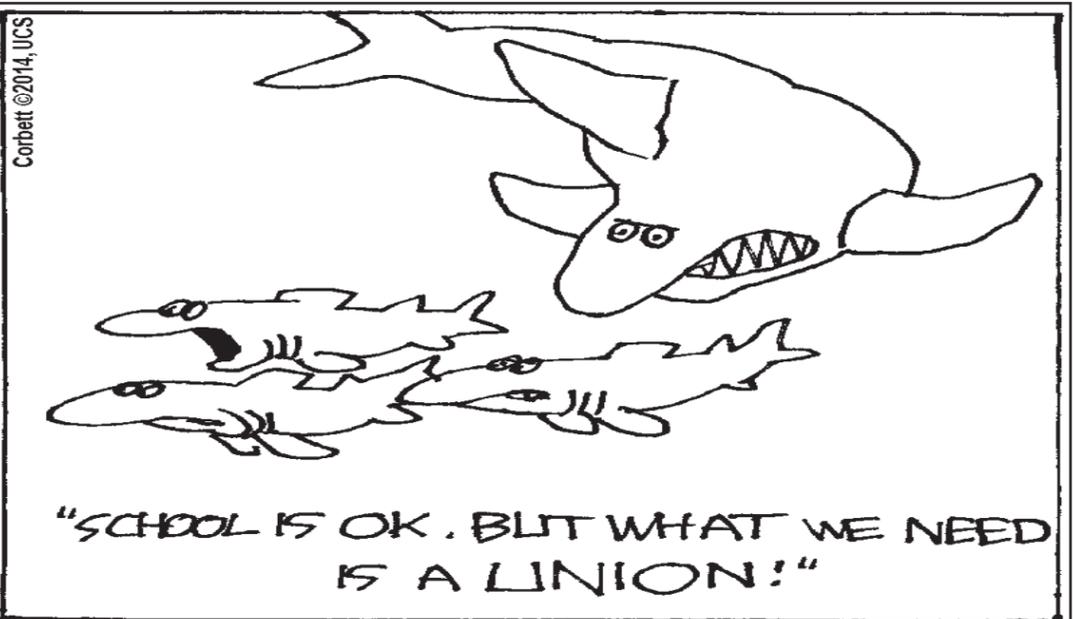


Members of the SIU Government Services Division are pictured in late July aboard the *USNS McLean* at Navy Weapons Station Earle (N.J.). The *McLean* is a government-owned dry cargo/ammunition ship.

Meeting in Maryland



SIU Government Services Division Representatives Sam Spain (left) and Kate Hunt (third from right) participated in a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Labor-Management forum July 23 in Linthicum, Maryland. Also pictured are (starting second from left) Jerry Gompers, Michael Ott and Diane Bentz of the USACE, MEBA Representative Tracy Burke and MM&P Representative Randi Ciszewski.



The *Federal Mariner* will resume publishing in the first quarter of 2015. Meanwhile, check for the latest SIU news on www.seafarers.org, on Twitter @SeafarersUnion and on our Facebook page (linked on the website's home page)

Understanding Your Benefits And How to Secure Them

Federal 'Open Season' Dates: Nov. 10-Dec. 8

Open season, the time of year that SIU CIVMARS and other federal workers make sure they have the appropriate health, dental, vision and other insurance benefits coverage for themselves and their families under the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program, is rapidly approaching. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recently announced the dates for the 2014 FEHB Open Season will be from November 10, 2014 through December 8, 2014.

During this period, CIVMARS can take the following actions regarding the Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS), Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP), and the FEHB Program:

- Enroll in a flexible spending account – a health care and/or dependent care account, under the FSAFEDS Program. Unlike with other programs, employees must reenroll in FSAFEDS each year to participate. Enrollments do not carry over from year to year. Important note: The maximum annual election for a Health Care Flexible Spending Account and the Limited Expense Health Care Flexible Spending Account is \$2,500 for the 2015 Benefit Period. The maximum annual election for a Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account is \$5,000 for the 2015 Benefit Period. The minimum election for the flexible spending accounts has changed from \$250 to \$100 for the 2015 Benefit Period.

- Enroll in, change, or cancel an existing enrollment in a dental plan under the FEDVIP Program.

- Enroll in, change, or cancel an existing enrollment in a vision plan under the FEDVIP Program, and

- Enroll in, change, or cancel an existing enrollment in a health plan under the FEHB Program.

OPM also stated it will post FEHB and FEDVIP premium rates for 2015 sometime

in October 2014. CIVMARS will be able to find specific Federal Benefits Open Season information on the OPM website (<http://www.opm.gov/insure>) by the first week in November.

In a related matter, the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (also known as Obamacare) generally has sparked some level of anxiety among insured Americans. Despite these concerns, OPM said the ground rules for FEHB coverage remain largely unaffected for eligible federal employees, retirees and dependents. The main effects of the law on the FEHB are provisions that allowed OPM to expand FEHB eligibility and offer additional consumer protections.

Among those, OPM extended family member coverage beginning in 2011 to offer coverage under a parent's FEHB plan to adult children up to age 26, just as non-FEHB plans were required to do. During that same year, FEHB plans were required to begin to fully cover, with no enrollee co-pay, preventive health services such as childhood immunizations, cancer screenings and tobacco cessation services. Under the act, OPM also required all FEHB plans to eliminate annual and lifetime limits on essential health benefits beginning with the 2013 contract year.

OPM also pointed out that while already launched ACA-mandated health insurance marketplaces provide individuals and small employers a central place to obtain coverage, they do not have any effect on FEHB enrollments.

Established in 1960, the FEHB Program is the largest employer-sponsored health benefits program in the United States. The government provides a weighted average contribution of 72 percent of premiums with a cap of no more than 75 percent of total premium cost. Approximately 90 percent of all federal employees participate in the program.



AB Christopher Allen

Seafarer Wins Union Plus Scholarship

SIU AB Christopher Allen is among the recently announced winners of Union Plus scholarships.

Union Plus, formed by the AFL-CIO in 1986 to offer valuable consumer benefits to union members and their families, awarded \$150,000 in scholarships to 116 students representing 39 unions for 2014. Allen's grant is for \$500.

The Jupiter, Florida, resident said he enjoys being at sea and appreciates everything the SIU has done to help his career.

"I was given an opportunity that some people would give anything to have," said Allen, who most recently sailed aboard the *BBC Seattle*, operated by General Dynamics American Overseas Marine.

Notwithstanding his affinity for the maritime industry, Allen – a graduate of Paul Hall Center Apprentice Class 739 – said he wants to pursue a degree in emergency medical services. He hopes to eventually become a firefighter.

Meanwhile, Union Plus already is accepting applications for its 2015 scholarships. Dues-paying SIU CIVMARS and their families are eligible to apply. Information about that program (and others) is available online at www.unionplus.org/education.

Leslie Tolf, president of Union Plus, noted, "There are a lot of benefits to being a union member. Economic security is number one, and education is the first building block.... By awarding these scholarships, we level the playing field. Everyone deserves an equal shot at a quality education."

Union Plus scholarship awards are granted to students attending a two-year college, four-year college, graduate school or a recognized technical or trade school. Since starting the program in 1991, Union Plus has awarded more than \$3.6 million in educational funding to more than 2,400 union members, spouses and dependent children.

NMC Updates STCW Page

CIVMARS should be aware of STCW requirements which may be updated in ways that impact your ability to maintain your credentials and eligibility for assignments aboard MSC vessels.

The U.S. Coast Guard's National Maritime Center (NMC) in early July posted numerous updates to its STCW Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) webpage. The page includes links to 24 PDF files, most of which were updated on July 7. They are available at:

www.uscg.mil/nmc/stcw/new_STCW_rule_faq.asp

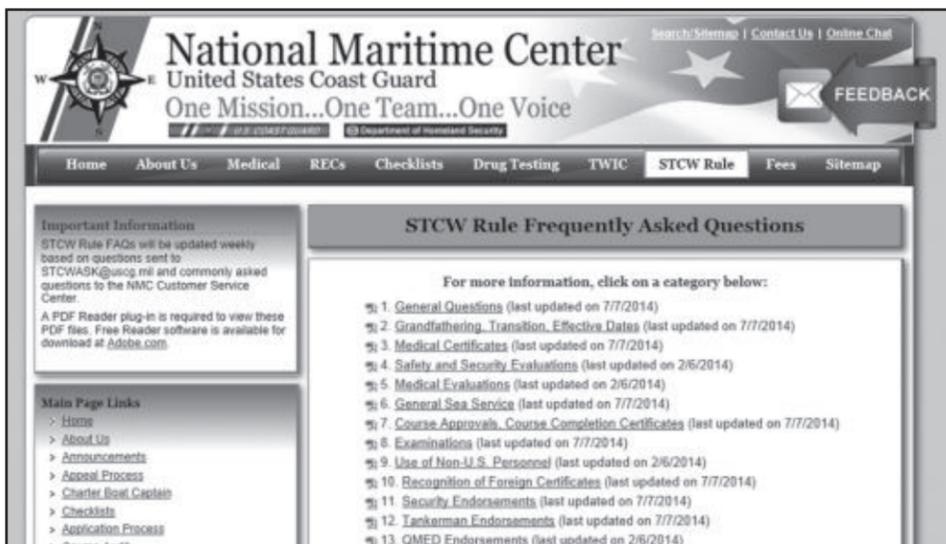
The NMC home page may be accessed at www.uscg.mil/nmc/

Questions for the agency may be emailed to stewask@uscg.mil or iasknmc@uscg.mil. The NMC is reachable by phone at 1-888-IASKNMC (1-888-427-5662).

STCW stands for International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers. The most recent changes to the convention, known as the Manila amendments, are being phased in, with a full compliance date of January 2017. (Some requirements already are in effect or take effect prior to January 2017.)

As pointed out by the Coast Guard, STCW only applies to mariners employed on vessels greater than 200 gross register tons (domestic tonnage) or 500 gross tons "operating seaward of the boundary lines specified in Title 46 CFR Part 7."

Should you have questions about the application of STCW requirements for your position and rating, you may e-mail siufedmariner@seafarers.org or call your marine placement specialist.



Most of the individual files on the NMC's page for STCW frequently asked questions were updated this summer.

TWIC Tweak Offers Direct Mailing

Spurred by a bipartisan Congressional effort that the SIU strongly supported, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in August began nationwide implementation of an eagerly anticipated program that reforms the process for acquiring a Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC).

The "OneVisit" program eliminates the need for mariners and other transportation workers to make two trips to a TWIC enrollment center to apply for and then activate their credential. Through the new program, an applicant may apply for a TWIC at an enrollment center and choose to receive the credential by mail.

According to the TSA, "This applies to new or renewed enrollment cards, Extended Expiration Date (EED) TWICs, or replacements for lost, stolen, or damaged cards. If you choose to receive your card by mail you will only be required to make one visit to an enrollment center to complete the enrollment process."

When you receive your card it will be activated and ready to use. A mailer with the card's preset Personal Identification Number (PIN) will be sent to you separately. You may also choose to pick up your card at an enrollment center."

Original cosponsors of the legislation that led to establishment of the OneVisit program and key committee leaders who played vital roles in advancing it through Congress included Reps. Steve Scalise (R-Louisiana), Elijah Cummings (D-Maryland), Peter King (R-New York), Candice Miller (R-Michigan), Cedric Richmond (D-Louisiana), Bennie Thompson (D-Mississippi) and Don Young (R-Alaska) in the House of Representatives; and, in the Senate, Sens. Kelly Ayotte (R-New Hampshire), Mark Begich (D-Alaska), Marco Rubio (R-Florida), and David Vitter (R-Louisiana).

For more information on the new program, visit the TSA's TWIC home page at www.tsa.gov/twic

Submissions Wanted

Attention all ACOE, NOAA, SBRF-MARAD and MSC federal mariners: Your work on behalf of our government is vital. Your union appreciates all you do in your workplace and on behalf of our nation.

We want your voices to be heard! We want to make sure we are writing about issues and topics that are of importance to all our Government Services units. Please send your comments, pictures and requests for coverage to siufedmariner@seafarers.org

We will do our best to print your photos and publish articles based on your requests.

Be active. Stay involved. Support the *Federal Mariner* and your union!

CIVMAR-Crewed USNS Byrd Rescues 9 in Gulf of Oman

Two Seafarers-crewed ships teamed up to bring nine foreign mariners to safety in the Gulf of Oman.

Members of the SIU Government Services Division aboard the *USNS Richard E. Byrd* on July 28 rescued nine mariners whose Yemeni-flagged cargo ship (the *Al Saed-1*) had lost power and was adrift in the Gulf of Oman. With the *Al Saed-1* taking on water, the foreign mariners abandoned ship and embarked in a life raft – but not before sending a call for help.

The *Byrd* was the first ship to respond to the distress signal, and rescued the Yemeni sailors around 9 a.m. local time. They were subsequently evaluated by the *Byrd*'s medical staff, and no injuries were reported.

One of the *Byrd*'s sister ships, the Seafarers-crewed *USNS Amelia Earhart*, then picked up the *Al Saed-1* crew and transported them back to Yemen.

Vice Adm. John W. Miller, commander of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, commended the crew for their actions in the rescue.

"Well done to the crew of *USNS Richard E Byrd* for expertly rendering assistance to *MV Al Saed-1*," said Miller. "Your efforts exemplify the U.S. Navy's commitment to the safety of all mariners. You can be justifiably proud of your efforts and teamwork."

Both the *Byrd* and the *Earhart* are part of the Military Sealift Command's fleet of dry cargo/ammunition ships, abbreviated as T-AKES. Each vessel in the class is 689 feet long, has a 106-foot beam and can sail at 20 knots. Each regularly carries a CIVMAR crew of 129.



This photo from the U.S. Coast Guard shows the *Al Saed-1* in the background and a life raft in the foreground.

President Obama, VP Biden Salute Unions on Labor Day Labor Secretary Perez Challenges Nation to Boost Worker Protections

While much of the country's workforce was taking a well-deserved Labor Day off, the executive office was busy giving inspirational pro-union speeches around the country. President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden both talked about the vital importance of unions in the American economy, while Labor Secretary Tom Perez issued a statement challenging America to boost its efforts for working families.

President Obama was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to speak at the Milwaukee Area Labor Council's annual "Laborfest." He began by thanking the numerous unions and union leaders in attendance, including the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO.

"We're here to celebrate something that sometimes the American people take for granted: the 40-hour work week, overtime pay, a minimum wage, weekends like this one," he stated. "All that didn't happen by accident. It happened because America's workers organized for it, fought for it. History shows that working families can get a fair shot in this country, but only if we're willing to fight for it."

The president then spoke about his expectations for the economy.

"I want an economy where your hard work pays off with higher wages, and higher incomes, and fairer pay for women, and workplace flexibility for parents, and affordable health insurance, and decent retirement benefits," he said. "I'm not asking for the moon, I just want a good deal for American workers."

Meanwhile, Vice President Biden was in Detroit on Labor Day to give a passionate speech on the importance of unions to a crowd of several hundred union members and their families. He spoke on the grounds of the old Tiger Stadium, which was demolished in 2009 and is now a public playing field.

The vice president led off his speech with an anecdote that illustrated his union background. He continued, "I talk about unions, because you're the reason why every other American worker has any of the basic rights they have."

He mentioned the Federal Labor Standards Act, the 40-hour work week, child labor laws, worker safety standards, overtime pay and minimum wage as being direct results of labor unions taking to the streets when they had to, generation after generation.

"It's not hyperbole: Unions did, in fact, build the middle class," Biden said. "And that built the United States of America as we know it."

U.S. Secretary of Labor Tom Perez made his Labor Day thoughts heard as well. In a written statement, he noted, "As a nation, we can do more to lift workers up, and to ensure that all hard-working people are able to climb ladders of opportunity and reach for the American dream. It's time to raise the national minimum wage, so that no one working a full-time job has to live in poverty. It's time to update our workplace policies to reflect the realities of the 21st century labor force and to support modern working families. It's time to continue our nation's long commitment to supporting unemployed workers by extending emergency unemployment compensation."

Perez concluded, "This Labor Day, let's remember that hard-working men and women are the backbone of our country, and let's redouble our efforts to uphold our nation's great promise to them: that if you work hard and play by the rules, you can make it in America."

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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With Federal Mariners in Hawaii



Members of the union's Government Services Division gather aboard the NOAA research support ship *Hi'ialakai* in Honolulu this summer. Pictured from left are AB Ryan Harris, GVA Frank Poloniak, EU Mike Wallace and SST Tonya Watson.