

## **A CALL TO ALL MERCHANT MARINERS BE PART OF THE SOLUTION - NOT PART OF THE PROBLEM**

### **History**

The National Mariners Association was established on April 1, 1999 by the AFL-CIO and four major maritime unions as the non-profit Gulf Coast Mariners Association (GCMA) and not as a labor union. On June 30, 2003, the maritime unions that assisted us to form and to represent "lower-level"/"limited tonnage" merchant mariners on workplace issues withdrew from the Gulf Coast area leaving us as an independent Association supported by our members? dues and donations. Our annual membership dues are \$36.00.

On January 1, 2008, the Association changed its name to the National Mariners Association to more accurately define the scope of our activities as national rather than regional. Full Story

### **The Merchant Marine**

Congress assigned the task of superintending the Merchant Marine to the U.S. Coast Guard. The Coast Guard has a number of "missions" including its Marine Safety mission that includes superintending maritime transportation and personnel. Our Association's relationship with the Coast Guard and with Congress focuses on the Coast Guard's "Marine Safety" mission.

The Coast Guard issues licenses and merchant mariner documents to approximately 213,903 merchant mariners. Of that number, approximately 126,000 hold "lower-level" or "limited-tonnage" credentials. Even this 126-thousand figure pales into insignificance when compared with the U.S. population of 305-million. Generally speaking, if you serve on a vessel of less than 1,600 gross register tons, you are in the group of 126,000 mariners that our Association serves.

Our mariners serve on all of our nation's tugboats, towboats, small passenger vessels, uninspected passenger vessels and most oilfield supply vessels. For the most part, but with notable exceptions, most "lower-level" mariners are not represented by maritime unions. Although we are not a union, we do not "compete" with unions for members. We welcome both union and non-union members to support us in our work.

### **Our Work**

Our Association seeks to represent the views of "lower-level" working mariners. Holding a job afloat includes confronting many dangers not found in workplaces ashore. Some jobs on the water can be extremely dangerous. While most shoreside occupations are regulated by OSHA, the Coast Guard regulates most aspects of the marine industry under their "Marine Safety" mission. We are concerned with how they perform their Marine Safety mission.

### **"Two" Coast Guards**

If anything, the "operational" Coast Guard (i.e., the seamen who operate Coast Guard vessels) are almost obsessed with safety. The "regulatory" Coast

Guard, on the other hand, has little personal experience at sea doing jobs that merchant mariners perform so they can't comprehend potential problems. It appears that they succumb to their conflicts of interest by asking the "suits" in the back offices of the marine industry who they appoint to various "safety committees" to coach them on what's best for "the bottom line." They do not encourage equal input from our mariners who actually perform the work on the water and confront safety issues first-hand day after day.

The "operational" Coast Guard performs a great service for the taxpayers of this country and for mariners in distress and is universally respected and often admired for doing so. The Coast Guard officers who command ships understand the risks that their crews face and want to protect them from some of the risks. On the other hand, Coast Guard officers who have no operational expertise and spend all of their time with their noses in the Code of Federal Regulations have no basis to understand the risks and, therefore, can't see any risks unless they hear about them second hand. Often, their industry "advisors" reiterate that "safety costs money" As a result, in the period since our Association has been in operation, the Coast Guard's Marine Safety mission appears to have faltered and lost its direction.

Congressional committees oversee the work of the Coast Guard and have become alarmed at the shortcomings in the Marine Safety mission. Congress invited the Inspector General's office in the Department of Homeland Security to look into "Coast Guard Investigations"? a part of their Marine Safety mission, and was disappointed in their findings. Congress held hearings on the Coast Guard's Administrative Law system whose relationship with our mariners is supposed to be "remedial" in nature and found the program in great disarray. Our Association reported on a number of disturbing cases involving our mariners.

Our Association informs its supporters by newsletter and with a series of "Research Reports" dealing with a number of issues. Over the years, we have pointed out to the Coast Guard as well as to Congress the issues and how they impact our mariners. We ask the Coast Guard to make changes in regulations and Congress to make changes in underlying laws that we believe are necessary. All this material is posted on our internet website maintained by our webmaster, Captain J. David Miller.

Our Report #R-350, Revision 4, Jan. 1, 2009, Mariners Seek Legislative Assistance from Congress on Marine Safety, Health, and Work-Related Problems, summarized most of the major problems lower-level mariners must contend with.

Our Association tries to work through several Coast Guard Federal Advisory Committees and "go through channels." Members of our Board of Directors serve on these committees. However, when the Coast Guard and their committees did not pay attention to the "lower-level" issues we presented to them, we brought these issues to the attention of Congress. To date, we supplied approximately 20 of the 150 "Research Reports" listed on our website directly to the attention of Congressional oversight committees.

We Need Your Support

We need to enlist the support of working mariners, retired mariners, their families and friends, maritime attorneys and members of the public to work to solve many of the issues we have identified. As you explore this website, please understand that we need your support to continue our work.