

Strengthening Alcohol Policies and Supporting Safety and Health in the Maritime Industry

Alcohol at Sea Committee

JANUARY 15, 2026

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Background



01



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Committee on Alcohol at Sea



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Information Gathering



02

Why Now?

maersk

I Was a 19-Year-Old Virgin When I Was Raped by a 60+ Year-Old 1st Engineer Aboard a Maersk Ship During Sea Year. I Know Several Other Current USMMA Students Who Were Also Raped During Sea Year.

This account was submitted to MLAA by the victim. She is a member of the class of 2022 at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy

- The U.S. maritime industry is vital to economic security and national defense but faces workforce shortages.
- Recent incidents involving alcohol misuse and sexual misconduct prompted federal study and reform efforts across academies, industry, and the Coast Guard.
- The committee's congressionally mandated study recommends evidence-based actions to prevent alcohol misuse, strengthen leadership, and foster a culture of safety and respect.

Statement of Task

- The National Academies will convene a committee to assess policies on alcohol possession and consumption aboard U.S. commercial vessels. The assessment will:
 - Evaluate safety, security, and welfare impacts of alcohol and other intoxicants.
 - Examine workplace factors contributing to misuse and related dangerous behaviors.
 - Review effectiveness of federal regulations and operator policies.
 - Identify best practices for prevention, education, reporting, and accountability.
 - Recommend changes to regulations and policies to promote a safe, secure workplace.

Individuals Consulted During Evidence Gathering

First Meeting

- Capt. Jerry Butwid, LCDR Jake Lobb, Martha Mannion, Jason Neubauer, Patrick Mannion, Mayte Medinas (U.S. Coast Guard)
- Sean Kline (Chamber of Shipping of America)
- Caitlyn Stewart (The American Waterways Operators)

Second Meeting

- Matthew Mueller (MARAD)

Third Meeting – Expert Panels

1. *Commercial Maritime Operators* – John Lake (PVA), Bob Zales (SFA; NACO), Sylvie Tran (Suncor)
2. *Support Services Organizations* – Miriam Anthony (MM&P), Laura McFalls (Women Offshore), Phillip Schifflin (SCI), Pam Kern (Port Medical Management)
3. *Workplace Safety Culture* – Dorothy Edwards (Alteristic), Mark Fleming (Saint Mary's Univ.), Elise Lopez (Univ. of Arizona), David Shapiro (Colorado School of Public Health)

Fourth Meeting – Site Visit (Jacksonville, FL)

- RADM David M. Wulf (USMMA), Ira Douglas, Francheska Bensen, Ray Fitzgerald, Patrick Tamasitis, Andrew Davis (Crowley Maritime)
- Dennis Houghton (Maersk Line, Ltd.), David Sloane (USMMI), William H. Moore & Molly McCafferty (The American Club)
- CAPT. Kenny Cady & crew (MV *Taíno*), Bob Johnston (RJE Shipping, LLC)

Meeting with Congressional Staff

- U.S. Senate Commerce Committee & U.S. House T&I Committee Staff

Fifth Meeting – Expert Panels

- Eric Dawicki (Northeast Maritime Institute), Admiral Okon (SUNY Maritime College)
- Denise Rucker Krepp (Directors Action Group), Christine Dunn (Sanford Heisler Sharp McKnight)
- Lindsay Price (Women Offshore Foundation)

Commissioned Paper Authors

- David St. Amand & B. St. Amand (Navigistics Consulting)

Key Takeaways & Recommendations



03

Reduce Acceptable Blood Alcohol Levels for Mariners on Duty and Prohibit Alcohol Possession by Crew

- Key Takeaways:
 - The romanticized image of “drinking at sea” contrasts with serious safety risks.
 - U.S. Coast Guard regulations set a BAC¹ limit of 0.04%, without a 0.02% active-duty restriction.
 - Even low levels² of can affect attention, judgment, and steering.
- Recommendations:
 - Remove mariners from duty if BAC is 0.02–0.039.
 - Report reasonable-cause tests for BAC in this range.
 - Prohibit alcohol possession and use for crew on U.S.-flagged vessels.

1. Blood Alcohol Concentration 2. *E.g.* - as low as 0.02–0.03%

Update Alcohol and Other Drug Testing Standards

- Key Takeaways:
 - Maritime regulations lack random alcohol testing requirements.
 - The Coast Guard's standard 5-panel drug test omits key impairing substances.
 - Funding reductions have limited the Coast Guard's capacity to oversee and modernize testing programs.
- Recommendations:
 - Include alcohol in random testing programs.
 - Keep drug testing panels current with industry best practices.
 - Align staffing and funding for compliance monitoring.

Strengthen Prevention and Response for Sexual Misconduct

- Key Takeaways:
 - Current maritime policies addressing substance misuse and sexual misconduct are disjointed and inconsistent.
 - EMBARC applies to a limited segment of the industry and remains unevaluated.
 - Strengthening culture requires coordinated standards, early response, bystander intervention, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Recommendations:
 - Study effectiveness of EMBARC program.
 - Set standards for dispute resolution, early response, and bystander support.
 - Apply protections to all U.S.-flagged vessels, not just EMBARC participants.

Invest in Mariner Health and Well-Being

- Key Takeaways:
 - Wellness programs can strengthen physical and mental health at sea.
 - Access to health care remains limited by cost, provider availability, and restrictive telemedicine laws.
 - Professional health programs in other industries show how combining accountability with recovery support can improve safety and workforce resilience.
- Recommendations:
 - Research interventions to reduce isolation, depression, and substance use.
 - Assess insurance, assistance programs, and clinician licensing.
 - Explore minimum staffing for well-being.
 - Allow licensed professionals to treat mariners regardless of ship location.
 - Establish a Mariner Assistance Program modeled on safety-sensitive industries.

Collect Better Data on Challenges Facing the Maritime Workforce

- Key Takeaways:

- Reliable evidence on alcohol and substance misuse in the maritime workforce remains scarce and fragmented across sources.
- National data show maritime workers report binge drinking at higher rates.¹
- Available evidence—including USMMA surveys—suggests underreporting of alcohol use, sexual misconduct, and disciplinary actions.

- Recommendations:

- Launch industry-wide data collection on alcohol and other drug use, well-being, and sexual misconduct.
- Assess population level data from cadet surveys, testing results, and disciplinary actions.
- Conduct regular mariner surveys to track trends.

1. (32.8%) than the general population (21.5%).

Raise Expectations for Maritime Institutes and Academies

- Key Takeaways:
 - Maritime academies shape the next generation of mariners but face challenges.
 - There is no common set of expectations across institutions.
 - Recent changes, such as the January 2025 elimination of affinity groups at USMMA, may affect community building and inclusion on campus.
- Recommendations:
 - Provide best-practice guidance for curricula and campus policies.
 - Include alcohol misuse, sexual misconduct prevention, and safety culture.
 - Assess adherence through accreditation and leadership training.

Improve Pre-Employment Screening, Re-Credentialing, and Training

- Key Takeaways:
 - Pre-employment and recredentialing processes present chances to identify mariners needing support or unsuitable for duty.
 - Gaps in disclosure requirements¹ can allow risks to go unaddressed within the active workforce.
 - The maritime industry lacks standardized pre-employment non-technical skills training.
- Recommendations:
 - Update mariner credential application (Form CG-719B) with validated screening tools.
 - Require 30-day disclosure of convictions or actions.
 - Review legal history before credential renewal.
 - Develop trainings on alcohol misuse, sexual misconduct, and non-technical skills.

1. With updates only every five years

Improve Reporting and Response

- Key Takeaways:

- Confidentiality, amnesty, and anti-retaliation protections enhance reporting.
- Survivor confidentiality can be balanced with investigative requirements for misconduct.
- Trauma-informed response practices support survivors and trust.

- Recommendations:

- Develop model amnesty policy for reporting.
- Require vessel companies to report retaliation policies.
- Train personnel on trauma-informed approach to substance misuse and sexual assault cases.

Support Accountability and Leadership to Establish a Culture of Health and Safety in the Maritime Industry

- Key Takeaways:

- Leadership is essential across all maritime organizations and vessels.
- Captains and managers should be accountable for workforce health and conduct.
- Clear standards and proactive leadership helps to build a culture of safety.

- Recommendations:

- Strengthen accountability for captains and senior leaders.
- Create best-practice guides and assessment tools for leadership and culture.
- Fund research on building healthy cultures of safety.

Q&A



04

Thank You!

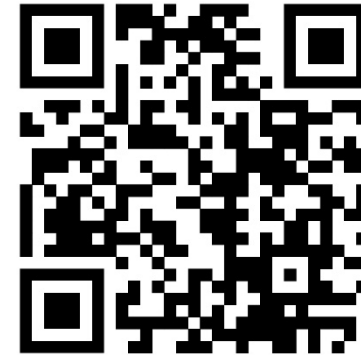


Access the full report online for free or purchase hard copies of the report via this QR code. For more information on the study, including full bios of the members of the authoring committee visit the study website.

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APPENDIX