

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION CIRCULAR NO. 6-89

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Subj: Physical Evaluation Guidelines for Merchant Mariner's Documents and Licenses

1. **PURPOSE.** The purpose of this Circular is to provide guidelines for evaluating an applicant's eligibility for a merchant mariner's document or license, insofar as physical condition is concerned.
2. **BACKGROUND.**
 - a. Various statutes in Title 46, United States Code and the implementing regulations in Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 10 and 12, require individuals to be physically as well as professionally qualified to hold certain merchant mariner's documents and licenses. With the exception of visual acuity and color vision, these requirements are not specific. The physician conducting the physical examination makes the initial determination whether or not the seaman is "fit for duty", that is, physically qualified to carry out his or her duties and responsibilities.
 - b. Health care, including physical examinations used to be provided to merchant seamen by the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS). The USPHS, in conjunction with the Coast Guard, maintained standards governing the physical examination of seamen to determine their fitness for duty. The OMNIBUS Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 eliminated USPHS health care for seamen. Applicants are now required to arrange for their physical examinations at their own expense. lacking specific guidelines for conducting the examination, and without a general familiarity with and appreciation for the maritime environment, most private physicians have been unable to effectively discharge this function.
3. **DISCUSSION.**
 - a. In order for a ship at sea to be operated safely, it has always been essential that the crewmembers be physically fit and free of debilitating illness and injury. The seafaring life is arduous and often hazardous and the availability of medical assistance or treatment resources is generally minimal. As the international trend toward smaller crews continues on virtually all classes of vessels, the ability of each crewmember to perform his or her routine duties and respond to emergencies becomes even more critical.

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- b. All mariners must be capable of living and working in cramped spaces, frequently in adverse weather causing violent motion of the vessel. Workdays of 12 to 20 hours are not uncommon. They must be able to climb steep or vertical ladders, and enter or exit enclosed compartments through hatches or doors with sills up to 2 feet. All hands must also be able to participate in emergency evolutions such as firefighting or launching lifeboats or liferafts. Members of the deck and engine departments need to be particularly capable of physical labor, climbing, and handling moderate weights.
- c. Enclosure (1) contains both general and specific standards to guide physicians and physician assistants in examining merchant seamen. It will also assist Coast Guard Licensing personnel in evaluating an applicant's eligibility based on the doctor's findings. No new requirements have been established. Rather, existing requirements policies, and interpretations have been consolidated and clarified so as to provide for uniform and consistent application.
- d. These guidelines are just that; guidelines. They are not intended to be absolute or all encompassing. Some individuals may have other conditions which would render them incompetent to perform their duties aboard a vessel. Others may be quite capable of working at sea without posing a risk to themselves, their ship or shipmates even though one of the listed conditions exists. Also, any cause for rejection should be considered disqualifying only while the condition persists or is likely to cause disqualifying complications. While each applicant must be evaluated for their physical competence individually, the conditions described in enclosure (1) are those which have been considered disqualifying by the medical and maritime communities. Waivers may be considered, however, where extenuating circumstances are such to warrant special consideration.

"DISQUALIFYING CONDITIONS"

The following conditions are considered to be disqualifying for the purposes of obtaining merchant mariner's documents or licenses:

EYES	Vision-visual acuity or color vision not meeting the standards promulgated in 46 CFR Parts 10 and 12.
EARS	Hearing - Original license - unaided average threshold higher than 40db in both ears at 500, 1000, 2000 and 3000 Hz and/or functional speech discrimination less than 90% at 55db in both ears. Renewal or raise in grade - unaided average threshold higher than 70db in both ears at 500, 1000, 2000 and 3000 Hz and/or functional speech discrimination less than 80% at 55db in both ears.
SPEECH	Severe speech impediment.
CARDIAC	History of multiple myocardial infarctions. Functional cardiac class III or IV (NYHA-New York Heart Association). Cardiac pacemaker implant. Any cardiac surgery requires further evaluation. Any other irregularity sufficient to compromise cardiac function.
	Hypertension - uncontrolled hypertension or hypertension controlled by medication requiring close monitoring. Original license - blood pressure higher than 150/90 (regardless of treatment with medication). Renewal or raise in grade - blood pressure higher than 160/100 if under age 50 or 175/100 if over age 50, on medication.
PULMONARY	Asthma or chronic lung disease requiring systemic corticosteroid medication or severe and/or frequent symptoms to incapacitate. Tuberculosis or other active pulmonary disease.
GASTRO - INTESTINAL	Chronic/Recurrent pancreatitis. Esophageal varices. One episode of gastrointestinal bleeding in the past 6 months or 2 episodes in the past 2 years.
GENITOURINARY	Chronic renal failure.
ORTHOPEDIC	Amputation or deformity, including arthritis, resulting in impairment of motion or use of limbs or back - may require further evaluation.
ENDOCRINE/ METABOLIC	Diabetes mellitus -Original license - insulin-dependent diabetes or poorly controlled non-insulin-dependent diabetes. Renewal or raise in grade - further evaluation required. Adrenal dysfunction to include: Addison's disease, Cushing's syndrome/disease, hyperaldosteronism. Obesity sufficient to impair ordinary activity.
HEMATOLOGIC/ ONCOLOGIC	Hemophilia. Malignancies -Leukemia Untreatable, recurrent or currently undergoing treatment (chemotherapy, radiation).

NEUROLOGIC	Convulsive disorders - Uncontrolled epilepsy or other convulsive disorder, or seizure-free for less than 1 year. All others require further evaluation. Any condition which seriously limits balance or coordination (e.g., Parkinson's disease, chorea, meniere's disease). Chronic organic/traumatic brain syndrome. Neurosyphilis. Narcolepsy. Senility.
PSYCHIATRIC	Diagnosis of primary psychosis. Any condition requiring the use of psychotropic medication(s). Suicidal behavior. Mental retardation. Drug addiction. Current or chronic alcohol abuse/alcohol dependence/alcoholism. Somnambulism.
ALLERGIES	Any severe allergy which would cause sudden incapacitation or be life-threatening.
INFECTIOUS DISEASES	Any communicable disease in its communicable or chronic carrier state which would present a health hazard to other crewmembers or passengers during casual shipboard contact.
MEDICATIONS	Anticoagulants (warfarin, Coumadin). Systemic corticosteroids. Psychotropic medications. Medication side effects - see below.
MISCELLANEOUS	Any other disease, constitutional defect, medication (or side effects) or therapy which might result in gradual deterioration of performance of duties, sudden incapacitation or compromise of shipboard safety while at sea.

4. ACTION.

- a. The guidelines contained in this circular apply to all merchant marine physical examinations and should be provided to physicians for use in conjunction with the physical examination form (OG 719K or equivalent).
- b. All Regional Examination Centers should use this circular as a guide when evaluating physical examination results submitted by mariners in accordance with 46 CFR Parts 10 and 12.



J. D. SIPES
Chief, Office of Marine Safety, Security
and Environmental Protection