

Coast Guard Substance Abuse Policy FAQ's
Edited: October 1, 2014

- 1. Why was there a need to establish a legal drinking age?** The principal purpose of an order to establish a minimum drinking age of 21 for Coast Guard members would be to help protect the health, safety and readiness of Coast Guard military members, as well as aiding in the maintenance of good order and discipline.

Findings from the 2011 Department of Defense Health-Related Behavior (HRB) Survey among active duty military personnel, revealed, among other things, that Coast Guard members drink more than DoD Service members and civilians in all age categories, except for the 40 years and older age cohort. The 2011HRB also reported that active duty drinkers who initiated alcohol use under 20 years of age often report higher work-related productivity loss from drinking, serious consequences from drinking, and engagement in risk behaviors than personnel who began drinking at older ages.

The 2013 State of the Behavioral Health of the Coast Guard report revealed that 40 percent of Coast Guard military members under age 21 report themselves as current drinkers. The report also revealed that Coast Guard members who began consuming alcohol at age 21, or older, had the lowest prevalence rate of serious consequences due to drinking, the lowest prevalence rate of work-related productivity loss due to drinking, and the lowest prevalence rate of engaging in risk behaviors due to drinking. The 2013 State of the Behavioral Health of the Coast Guard report also revealed that Coast Guard members reporting that they experienced social network facilitation of alcohol consumption had a higher prevalence of heavy alcohol consumption, than those who did not experience social network facilitation of alcohol consumption.

Based on a review of research and the data regarding health behaviors of the Coast Guard workforce, the Commandant has directed the development and promulgation of, among other policy changes, an order to establish a minimum drinking age of 21 for Coast Guard military members, wherever located, subject to certain narrow exceptions. This policy intervention is expected to help delay the age of onset of alcohol consumption for new Coast Guard members in the 18-20 age cohort, by eliminating or reducing alcohol consumption, particularly where leaders watch for signs of use, and employ medical and support methods to mitigate alcohol use, and administrative and disciplinary tools to enforce the order. The policy will also tend to disrupt and prevent social network facilitation of alcohol use for our most junior members.

- 2. Is there any command discretion for allowing underage members to drink alcohol?** No. The general order is intended to be broader in scope than existing drinking age policy promulgated in "Military Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Programs," DODI 1015.10. That policy, issued pursuant to 10 U.S.C. § 2683(c), provide for some flexibility, but the new Coast Guard minimum drinking age policy does not. Coast Guard members must adhere to the policy, subject to certain exceptions, regardless of state, territory, possession, or foreign country laws with regarding purchasing, serving, selling, possessing or consuming alcoholic beverages while on or off base. The new policy is a punitive general order, and violation of its prohibition may subject a member to adverse administrative consequences, or nonjudicial or judicial action under the Uniform Code of military Justice (UCMJ).

3. **What was the purpose of establishing alcohol and military duty standards?** There was no servicewide standard that supported the definition of responsible drinking. Instituting servicewide standards consolidates existing operational policies and establishes a servicewide minimum standard. The guidelines reinforce minimum periods of abstinence in policy to ensure fitness for duty where violations constitute grounds for an alcohol incident. Commands and members should consult the references below for their community. The policies referenced to establish this servicewide policy were:
Coast Guard Air Operations Manual, COMDTINST M3710.1 (series);
Coast Guard Boat Operations & Training (BOAT) Manual, COMDTINST M16114 (series); and
Shipboard Regulations Manual, COMDTINST M5000.7A.
4. **What exactly does “free from residual effects of alcohol” mean?** This means there is no physical impairment, scent of alcohol, slurred speech, or any other related effects of recent drinking, including being “hungover” from not stopping early enough to allow your body to recover.
5. **Will my district commander still be able to endorse any separation package that may be forwarded to CG PSC?** Yes; however, the authority to retain an individual recommended for separation because of substance abuse will remain with CG PSC. The first flag officer in the member’s chain of command is authorized to endorse a request for a “second chance” waiver to CG PSC.
6. **Why has the Coast Guard adopted a zero-tolerance approach to driving under the influence (DUI)?** Studies show drivers who have driven impaired do so an average 80 times before they are caught. The best predictor of whether someone will get a DUI is whether they had one in the past. Someone who drives while intoxicated or impaired due to substance abuse puts their own safety and the safety of all those around them at risk. Therefore, after a DUI, the command has a responsibility to thoroughly review a member’s record prior to recommending continued service in the required administrative discharge package.
7. **Why was the use of “alcohol situation” removed?** The term “alcohol situation” by definition has no associated alcohol use. It relates to general misconduct, such as providing alcohol to a minor or permitting excessive use of alcohol by subordinates. An alcohol situation typically falls into the realm of conduct that should be documented and disciplined as any other misconduct. Additionally, events that meet the criteria for an alcohol incident have often been wrongly classified as an alcohol situation. In cases like this a member would not receive the rehabilitation or treatment that could prevent a future alcohol incident.
8. **Why was “command referral” added as a means for a member to be referred for alcohol screening?** The command referral option was included to allow commands the ability to direct medical intervention in situations where alcohol appears to impact the member in a negative manner but has not yet resulted in performance or conduct deficiencies that would merit an alcohol incident. “Self referral” and “command referral” are non-punitive. If a member has an alcohol incident subsequent to any referral, it is still an alcohol incident and will be processed administratively.

- 9. What documentation will be retained in my personnel data record (PDR) and what will be retained in my medical record?** In an effort to disengage administrative issues from medical matters, the CG-3307 for placement in the PDR will document the circumstances of the alcohol incident only. All documentation related to behavioral health screening and treatment will be entered in the member's health record. This methodology ensures that there are no violations of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). The HIPAA privacy rule is the first comprehensive federal protection for the privacy of personal health information.
- 10. How will commands be made aware of the treatment progress of members within their command?** Command cadre shall receive fitness for duty and other limitations/restrictions from a medical officer within the uniformed services medical network, as with any other medical/mental health condition, or whenever requested.
- 11. What is changing regarding the scope of "Zero Tolerance for Illicit Drug Use?"** The changes to be made will include the prohibition of designer drugs, the misuse of over-the-counter products, and the misuse of synthetic or natural substances that may in fact be "legal" to purchase, but can be used in an illegal manner. As a Service with a law enforcement mission, it is imperative that we hold ourselves to the highest standards and remain informed of substance abuse trends and misuses. Members living in or travelling through states that are more lenient in their drug laws must be especially cognizant of their surroundings to avoid being placed in a situation where they could violate this policy.
- 12. Will medical screening and diagnostics be available for Reservists?** We are exploring policy changes that will allow Coast Guard Reservists to be screened by trained medical officers for alcohol and substance abuse, regardless of duty status. These changes, however, will not cover treatment for Reservists who are screened. Treatment options would be based on duty status and the member's private insurance.
- 13. I'm a Reservist that performs inactive duty for training (IDT) "drills" two days per month and perform active duty for training (ADT) two weeks a year. How will these updates to policy affect me when I am in civilian status?** The Reserve-specific requirements regarding substance and alcohol abuse in Chapter 1.D. of COMDTINST M1000.10 are unchanged. Reservists are subject to the UCMJ only while performing inactive or active duty. However, reservists are required to self report an arrest or conviction regardless of reserve duty status as required by Article 1.D.5.b.
- 14. How does the 21 minimum drinking age general order impact Coast Guard Exchange (CGX) and Morale, Well-Being, and Recreation (MWR) operations?** In order to ensure 100 percent compliance with these changes, CGX stores, regardless of local laws on drinking age, will no longer sell alcoholic beverages to anyone under the age of 21. This stricter enforcement of the policy will provide the adequate safeguards to ensure CGX stores are complying with the changes directed. Additionally, MWR and non-appropriated fund (NAF) program policies will be changed to prohibit the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages by anyone under the age of 21. This change will also ensure that in those locations where on premise consumption is authorized, MWR operations will be in full compliance with this change.

15. If my DUI case is in civilian court adjudication or is active under Coast Guard investigation or administrative proceedings, does this clarified policy apply to me?

This policy is effective 1 May 2014 and is not retroactive. However, Articles 1.A.14 (for Officers) and 1.B.17 (for Enlisted members) of Military Separations, COMDTINST M1000.4, prescribe that separation from the Service was always a possible administrative consequence for DUI. Commands should contact PSC for guidance regarding initiating administrative discharge proceedings under these circumstances.

16. An officer at my unit has received a DUI, how are administrative discharge proceedings initiated in accordance with paragraph 4.d. of the Changes to Coast Guard Substance Abuse Policy ALCOAST?

Article 1.A.14.c. of Military Separations, COMDTINST M1000.4, lists the causes for separation of a Coast Guard officer. Subsection (2)(e) and (2)(h) are applicable to most DUI cases. Subsection (2)(e) pertains to "acts of personal misconduct prohibited by military or civilian authorities" and subsection (2)(h) pertains to "involvement in a drug or alcohol incident" as defined in Coast Guard Drug and Alcohol Abuse Program, COMDTINST M1000.10 (Series).

If an officer has received a DUI, their command cadre should notify OPM-1 or RPM-1 (for Reserve Officer) of the incident. Once the member has completed the mandatory screening process and all necessary documentation has been signed and submitted to the SPO for inclusion into the member's PDR, OPM, or RPM will review the officer's record and weigh all the facts and circumstances surrounding the case. At the conclusion of the review, the member will be notified if Special Board action will be initiated under the relevant Article of Chapter 1 in Military Separations, COMDTINST M1000.4 (i.e., Article 1.A.10 for regular officers with less than five years of commissioned Service; Article 1.A.14 for regular officers with greater than five years of commissioned Service, Article 1.A.19 for Chief Warrant Officers with less than three years commissioned Service, etc.). In accordance with COMDTINST M1001.28, Article 8.A.2.a. and COMDTINST M1000.4, separation for cause of reserve officers serving on active duty applies equally to inactive duty reserve officers.