

Combat-Related Special Compensation A Benefit Too Many Retirees Overlook

CDR Benjamin D. Mazyck

Benjamin.D.Mazyck@uscg.mil

Many Coast Guard retirees may be missing out on a significant, tax-free monthly benefit known as Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC). Designed to restore part of a retiree's military pension that was waived to receive Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability compensation, CRSC puts additional money back into retirees' pockets. But not every disability qualifies, only those tied to combat or operationally hazardous duties are eligible.

For years, a narrow statutory definition left many Coast Guard retirees on the outside looking in. Before 2015, CRSC was usually limited to wounds from combat or mishaps that directly mimicked combat. For Coast Guard missions, which are often hazardous but don't fit neatly into a "combat" label, eligibility was difficult to prove.

Congress addressed this in the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015, which expanded CRSC to include Coast Guard missions such as aviation duty, diving, rescue swimmer operations, and hazardous small boat duty in heavy seas. For the first time, Coast Guard retirees could apply on the same footing as their Department of War counterparts.

The Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 went even further, expanding CRSC to cover disabilities linked to hazardous exposures such as asbestos, benzene, heavy metals, radiation, and other toxic agents. These exposures, common in Coast Guard service, may now qualify as "combat-related" for CRSC purposes. Retirees do not have to prove participation in a monitoring program such as the Coast Guard's Occupational Medical Surveillance and Evaluation Program (OMSEP). Instead, they need credible documentation showing exposure during service.

Today, CRSC eligibility is broader than ever. A surfman injured in heavy-weather operations, a diver experiencing long-term effects of underwater exposure, or a veteran diagnosed with service-connected cancer tied to chemical exposure may all qualify for tax-free monthly compensation.

Applying takes careful attention to detail. Retirees must submit DD Form 2860 (CRSC Application) along with documentation that ties their condition to Coast Guard duty. This could include medical records, retirement orders, Line of Duty determinations, mishap reports, or even witness statements. Each disability requires its own documentation; if applying for five conditions, retirees must provide five supporting record sets along with a DD-214.

The Coast Guard's Pay and Personnel Center (PPC) in Topeka, Kansas, manages CRSC payments, while the Personnel Service Center's Medical Administration Branch (PSC-PSD-MED) reviews applications to confirm whether the condition is combat-related. Thanks to process improvements, today's applications are processed in three to four months, much faster than the six to eight months typical in the past.