

## ***White paper – Why waive the ‘exam’ requirement?***

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Based on conversations with many of you, we have concluded that this Operating Committee recommendation to the Governing Board is not well understood. This white paper addresses the recommendation, its rationale, its advantages and perceived disadvantages, and how its effects will be measured.

### ***What are the specifics?***

The USPS by-laws have a provision (Section 3.6) describe the three conditions under which a person *may* be considered for membership. Condition (1) states the core criteria for membership: “Any person who is able and willing to contribute time, energy and skills to the objectives of USPS” and it is up to the discretion of the squadron to determine that. Condition (2) requires the candidate to have “passed an examination approved by the Operating Committee”.

There is NO educational requirement, just an exam requirement that is at the discretion of the Operating Committee to select. It is this exam requirement that we seek to waive for a period of three years, after which time, the condition will be restored in full force unless otherwise amended by two-thirds vote of the Governing Board.

Even with the waiver of condition (2), condition (1) remains in full effect – there is no automatic route to membership.

### ***Why waive the requirement?***

Many ask, “Why waive the requirement?” There are several factors that critically impact the health of USPS:

- 1) We have a membership that is in a slow, steady decline – with each year, our image and effectiveness as an organization will continue to diminish unless we revitalize USPS with fresh members.
- 2) We have historically used our public boating safety courses as our primary means of attracting new members – we now face considerable competition in this area, even free state-sponsored courses (some 256 current NASBLA approved courses vs. a handful a decade ago). Thus, even with superior material, our enrollment has been in slow, steady decline which has produced the corresponding decline in membership.
- 3) There is a substantial base of experienced boaters that could significantly benefit USPS. We would like to attract them to our programs and membership. It is clear that the vast majority of these boaters are disinclined to take a very basic exam before joining USPS.

- 4) We have developed the USPS University – Seminar Series of short programs to be offered to the public and members. This seminar series demonstrates the core capability of USPS and takes us in a direction without peer or competition to attract both new and experienced boaters to USPS.

We want to use the new seminar series as a vehicle to attract and directly admit new members, particularly the experienced boater we have otherwise missed. While this is just a segment of boating safety, we have the opportunity to attract them to other programs and to membership where they will benefit from a well rounded program. Many SEO's say, "once we get them in the door, we'll get them into the educational program and teach them what they need to know." – let's give them the chance.

### ***Are we abandoning our role to educate the boating public?***

Certainly, not – in fact, we want to increase our education of the boating public. Teaching boating safety courses to the public is mandated in the charter of every squadron and is the basis of our status as a not-for-profit organization – we want to reinforce that responsibility.

First, we are strengthening our basic boating safety program and are developing campaigns to promote it. Since many states are going to mandatory boating education, this means a substantial percentage of students will want the certificate and nothing more. There is a tendency to water down the requirements as can be seen in many competing programs – that is not boating safety. Our approach is to continue to offer a recognized quality program. At least we want to hold our own on numbers and go for quality.

Second, we be using our seminars as a means of raising public awareness and education, and encourage attendees to get solid boating safety training.

Third, we are developing *Boat Operator Certification* as a program that will build a demand for more and advanced boating education and draw boaters to membership.

### ***Are we watering down our standards and educational mission?***

Quite the contrary, we are building a robust program via our USPS University program. We will be adding seminars, more elective courses, mini-courses, and *Boat Operator Certification*. The latter will include skill demonstrations including on-the-water demonstrations and certification.

Based on presentations of this program in the boating safety community, we have become recognized for taking the lead in advanced recreational boater certification. This has become a priority identified need and the U.S. Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety has the task to figure out how to promote and track advanced boater education. We are paving the way, and we want ways for experienced boaters to get to us and become members, so they can further their education.

The exam requirement as currently defined by the Operating Committee can be satisfied by completion of any NASBLA approved course or equivalent exam. Unfortunately, this

is but a marginal indicator of an individual's boating skills. In short, fulfilling this requirement is not truly meaningful. We would rather have boaters join and engage in quality courses and programs.

***Does the proposed waiver mean that anyone can join?***

No – individuals are still invited to membership. It is not automatic. We believe that during the seminar experience, we will have the opportunity to get to know the participants and have a basis for selecting those we choose to invite to membership. We are including membership applications with the student notes book, but the application still needs approval by the squadron.

***How do we know if we have succeeded with the waiver?***

This is an important question. We maintain very detailed statistics on our course and program utilization. We will consider this temporary waiver to have been a success if our aggregate number of courses completed per year has risen. In addition, we track the percentage of members who have completed courses and we expect that to rise as well.

Currently, we educate some 25,000 individuals in basic boating safety and 7,100 in USPS courses per year, plus an estimated 10,000 more in various seminars. 59% of all current members have completed Seamanship and 47% have completed Piloting. The waiver will affect the course attendance plus seminars. We expect both the total number of annual completions and the percentages to rise and that is what we will consider to be a success. We will track the number of public attendees and the composite of boating safety courses and seminars is expect to rise, but that is independent of the effects of the waiver.

***Where does this lead us?***

Since most states are moving toward mandatory boating safety education, our current requirement may be a mute point within five years as more and more of the boating public will be required by law to complete an approved course – thus satisfying our current entry requirement.

In the meantime, USPS will benefit by garnering more of the experienced boaters who are likely to be exempt from many of these new state laws anyway. Our standards and image should be based on our quality programs and building attendance, not on an arbitrary entry level exam.