



WAVES

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State Liaison Program

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2001 REPORT ON STATE LIAISON PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Just over one year ago, based on perceptions that the State Liaison program was ineffective and failing to produce the desired results of interaction between state boating safety officials and the Auxiliary to further recreational boating safety (RBS), an internal Boating Department evaluation was conducted. The Department Chief, State Liaison Division Chief and two Branch Chiefs determined that in the three (now four) years following the creation of the Auxiliary's Boating Department, varying degrees of success had surfaced with regard to the State Liaison Officer (SLO) program. Following the release of that report, an aggressive effort was launched to improve the program.

We are making progress. Everyone involved has faced their fair share of challenges, but it is apparent that a few District Commodores (DCOs) either do not take the program seriously or don't have time to hold their SLOs accountable for effectively communicating their activity within the state on the DCOs behalf. It would be easy to point the finger of failure at the State Liaison Officers (SLOs) that aren't getting the job done, but they do after all, serve at the pleasure of the DCO who appoint them. And the paper that was completed a year ago and forwarded to each DCO was a blueprint for success. The paper was also forwarded to every new SLO appointed to serve in 2001.

Just as a year ago, in several districts, active and hard working Auxiliarists were again appointed to the SLO position by their respective DCO and the program flourishes. In many states however, based on the

reported activity, again as in the past, the only conclusion to be drawn is that the SLO is nothing more than a name in a slot. The good news is there are known exceptions of which the Department is aware because the BLAs (Boating Law Administrators) and others report that all is well and the relationships are great. The problem that remains for us to overcome is that the reports are coming in to us from sources outside of the Auxiliary.

In other cases however, virtually every district is represented by states with no apparent involvement by the SLO and the state's BLA, let alone other boating safety officials. According to the Department's branch chiefs, when asked if regular communications exist between them and the SLOs in their area of responsibility (AOR), I was advised that no report has been received from 15 states this entire year. But again, even though we're not receiving reports, we are aware that the relationships are in some cases excellent. For example, we know through the BLAs and others that the Auxiliary enjoys an excellent relationship in many states that we're not receiving reports from and are rapidly improving in others. But with many states, we simply just don't know.

On the other end of the spectrum, models of success can be held up as examples for us to strive towards. Many Districts with good programs and excellent communications are scattered across the country, however District 13 has displayed the greatest consistency for each state within the District. This is the one district where all stakeholders; the District RBS, DCO, SLOs, BLAs and other principals regularly meet and keep one another informed of their activities, communicating to the Boating Department through the SLOs. All the districts have their individual successes with specific states, but District 13 stands alone in their program of Auxiliary and State interaction and follow-up reporting.

Having made significant progress in many states, the major problem that remains is that in several states, there appears to be little to no activity whatsoever originating with the SLO.

The single most important function of the SLO is to arrange a meeting between the DCO and BLA for their State annually. In many states, this meeting has been expanded to include representatives of the state's boating safety education program, DIRAUX and others, both members of the Auxiliary such as Division Captains and other stakeholders involved in RBS within the state. According to the latest reports from the Boating Department's Branch Chiefs, this meeting has not been held in the majority of states that are within their AOR. It would be far easier to list those where the meeting has occurred rather than those where it hasn't and the reasons are varied. In the Pacific Area for example, only five states out of 13 (38%) have had a DCO/BLA meeting to set the agenda for the coming year. In the ATL (W), according to our reports not a SINGLE DCO/BLA meeting dedicated to setting the coming year's agenda has occurred. In the ATL (E), 10 of 19 states (47%) have had a meeting devoted specifically to RBS attended by the DCO and other boating safety principals. However the good news is that we know an acceptable alternative meeting is happening with the DCO represented by the SLO, Division Captains or others.

One concern with meetings not attended by the DCO however, is that these meetings are probably not attended by DIRAUX and other major players in the District as well. If they are, it's not being reported. And if they aren't being reported, they aren't viewed with the emphasis that would enhance the overall effectiveness of the Auxiliary within the state.

The same can be said for monitoring MOUs between the states and the Coast Guard. Efforts are being made to improve the process, but on a national basis, reportedly through the SLOs, few MOUs have been developed that recognize the potential contributions of the Auxiliary as a part on a single MOU between a State and the Coast Guard. Again, the validity of this situation is at best questionable because in many

cases, we aren't getting the information reported.

Last year, the top three goals and objectives to achieve the desired results in the SLO program were:

- Track and log annual BLA meetings by state and communicate the outcome of the meetings.
- Facilitate maintenance of MOUs with their state.
- Initiate direct communication via email to state BLAs via the SLOs through the branch chiefs indicating Auxiliary activities occurring in the state, i.e., the number of boating safety classes and student numbers, SITREPs from patrols and AUXMIS reports indicating the amount of Auxiliary activity within the specific state.

We know that BLA meetings are occurring with greater regularity and effectiveness in at least 28 states and/or territories. We believe that a meeting of some type has been conducted in most, if not all of the states/territories, but were attended by a SLO or division captain representing the DCO.

The program has progressed well in the preceding year through the efforts of all concerned. However opportunity exists for greater progress through continued and coordinated efforts across organizational boundaries involving each Coast Guard District and Auxiliary District Commodore.

In the year following our initial assessment of the program, much has improved through the leadership of the Boating Department. However, without the DIRECT involvement of the DCO in each district, the SLO program cannot sustain effectiveness. The DCOs must appoint active and dedicated Auxiliarists to carry both their and the Auxiliary's message. Additionally, the DCO must then demonstrate their support for the SLO and the state s/he represents by holding the Coast Guard District accountable for their support of the program as well.

Don't forget the 8-31-01 Deadline for the BoatU.S. Grassroots Grants Applications

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