

TO: The UNOLS Council

FROM: Matthew Hawkins, RVOC Chair
Bill Martin, RVTEC Chair

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SUBJECT: Recruiting and Retention of Personnel

The recruitment and retention of skilled technicians and crewmembers is a critical factor for ensuring the high quality of UNOLS fleet operations. The UNOLS Council has recognized this as an extremely important factor previously, and the issue has been circulating in meeting agendas for both RVTEC and RVOC for several years. In the mean time, the ability to attract and retain competent crew and technicians for the fleet is reaching crisis proportions. Competition from the private sector is at an all time high due to the robust offshore markets and a thriving technical sector. The amount of time and effort it now takes to ensure UNOLS ships are properly manned has become extraordinary; particularly for the larger vessels where minimum manning levels are dictated. Though no science cruises have been delayed to date, there have been many examples of “near misses” and sailing “short”. The eventual delay or cancellation seems inevitable.

Though the details vary between operations, the Marine Superintendents and Technical Coordinators generally view the main problems as:

1. Significantly lower salaries compared to the private sector – both sea-going and shore-based.
2. Lack of advancement opportunities within individual operations and throughout the fleet. This has been exacerbated by the virtual elimination of the “hawse pipe” under the new licensing and training regulations.
3. Lack of dependable and substantial funding support for training, license upgrade, and technical advancement.
4. Increasing operational demands and lack of sufficient personnel to effectively meet those demands.
5. Increasing regulatory burden on all fronts taking time and effort from the real mission of supporting science.
6. Discrepancies in pay, benefits, and leave packages throughout the fleet – and between departments within the vessel operations themselves.
7. Lack of confidence in the long-term viability of the UNOLS fleet.

In short, moral is low and getting lower. Competition from the rest of the marine sector is high, the pool of qualified maritime personnel is shrinking, and the ever-widening salary and benefits gap (both real and perceived) continues to diminish the “feel good” factor of supporting science.

Because of the urgency of this problem, we, the RVTEC and RVOC Chairs and Vice Chairs/Chair Elects, will begin gathering information from the various operating institutions to generate a list of tangible solutions to the problem. We will then present this list to the UNOLS Council for consideration and possible action by the fall 2007 meeting.

It is our sincere hope that through the concerted efforts of the RVOC, RVTEC, and the Council that we will be able to make changes that will help in securing and maintaining the skilled and highly professional personnel needed to support science at sea.