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In our daily efforts to complete tasks and meet deadlines, it is often easy to lose sight of the crucial mission we have at MARAD: strengthening the U.S. maritime transportation system to meet the economic and security needs of the nation. This broad and complex mission is ultimately what all our work is about.

Our Information Technology (IT) organization exists to help you make contributions toward fulfilling MARAD's critical mission. We do this by continually seeking partnerships with our customers and improving our overall performance. Our hope is that the *MARAD IT Newsletter* will make the MARAD IT mission and customer focus clear while acting as a catalyst for information sharing between our service organization and you, the customers we serve.



Donna Seymour, CIO

In each issue, we'll offer several news stories that highlight some of the ways the IT organization is partnering with customers throughout MARAD to contribute to MARAD's mission. In this first issue we'll look at our consolidation with the DOT Common Operating Environment. This consolidation will help enable you to work more efficiently and effectively with co-workers from other agencies within DOT. We'll look at technology enhancements that are being deployed aboard Ready Reserve Force (RRF) ships, enabling the RRF to more effectively respond when duty calls. This issue will also show how technology has changed the way MARAD responds to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests in direct service to citizens.

The stories you read here will illustrate various ways we pursue the achievement of MARAD's mission through MARAD's four strategic objectives: ensuring commercial mobility, supporting national security, protecting the environment, and maintaining an excellent organization. As you read, you will see how all of our efforts in IT can be tied to one or more of these objectives. The Ready Reserve Force story, for instance, illustrates efforts toward both the national security and organizational excellence objectives.

MARAD's IT organization has its own key objectives which help us remain customer-focused, ensuring we meet your needs while working within the framework of the MARAD and DOT strategic plans. We are almost finished with MARAD's first-ever Electronic Government (E-Government) Plan where we document these key IT objectives and show you how they relate to the MARAD mission objectives. You'll be able to read more about it in upcoming issues of the *MARAD IT Newsletter*.

Every issue will offer a calendar of upcoming events, some helpful IT Tips and Tricks, some metrics we use to measure how we're doing, and more. We hope you'll enjoy this first issue of the *MARAD IT Newsletter* and will come back regularly to learn about new ways we're servicing our customers. Next time you see me in the hallway, be sure to let me know what you think. Or send me an email at ITeditor@marad.dot.gov and let me know what you want to hear about next.

Isn't IT Interesting?

Get to government websites quicker. The popular Internet search engine Google offers a feature specifically for government sites. Find a government site faster at www.google.com/unclesam. Most of the hits will be from sites with .gov or .mil extensions. It's a good way to limit your web search results strictly to government sources and can be a real time-saver.

Donna Seymour



FOIA-Xpress Improves FOIA Processing and Reporting

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) became law in 1966, requiring all federal agencies to make their records and information more available to citizens. Since that time, FOIA requests have played a part in a wide range of issues from the banning of Red Dye #2 to the recall of the Ford Pinto.

MARAD's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) office receives a steady flow of requests from students, reporters, attorneys, interest groups, and citizen organizations for detailed information on a variety of topics. FOIA staff must respond in a timely manner to each request to make government records and information more available to citizens.

Until recently, MARAD's three FOIA Office staffers manually processed each request.

That meant making copies of every request, creating new documents for every program office, providing information related to each request, and ensuring request packets were appropriately routed to program offices responsible for assessing compliance with federal guidelines pertaining to the request. They made copies of every final, approved packet before it was sent to the requestor, sometimes containing hundreds of pages of documents. Along the way, they kept track of all their requests to provide accurate budgeting and reporting as required by Congress.

Now, staffers use a database management software system called FOIA-Xpress, which automates many of these manual processes. The new technology tool allows staffers to focus on managing results instead of the intricacies of the process.

"When requests were still handled on paper, it could be challenging at times to meet our deadlines," said Jeannette Riddick, Information Management Specialist, Freedom of Information Act Office. "Our entire process became much more manageable and accountable when FOIA-Xpress came along."

FOIA-Xpress is a database management tool that enabled large parts of MARAD's FOIA request-handling process to be automated. With FOIA-Xpress, the FOIA Coordinator creates an electronic file for every incoming request. Paper requests are scanned into the system to create electronic records, though most requests are now received in electronic form via e-mail.

Once a record is created and given a FOIA-Xpress control number, it is routed via e-mail to the program and other offices that need to either provide information or ensure compliance with laws, regulations, policies, and procedures. Once a packet is complete, it is returned to the requestor in the form in which it was received (electronic or paper).

FOIA-Xpress allows the FOIA Coordinator to route and track each request from the desktop. It also alerts the Coordinator to pending due dates, keeps records of related billings (the costs of all requests are covered by the requestors), and creates reports of all required data so that MARAD can accurately provide the Department of Transportation and Congress with information mandated by law.

The Office of the CIO purchased the FOIA-Xpress system for MARAD, oversaw its implementation, and managed the required training in its use. While technology cannot replace the individual contributions of FOIA office team members, it does make responses to FOIA requests more efficient, manageable, and accountable, and allows the FOIA office to focus more directly on citizen service.

"... I spend less time at the copier ...and more time at my desk responding to inquiries from requestors...wouldn't go back to the old way of doing things."

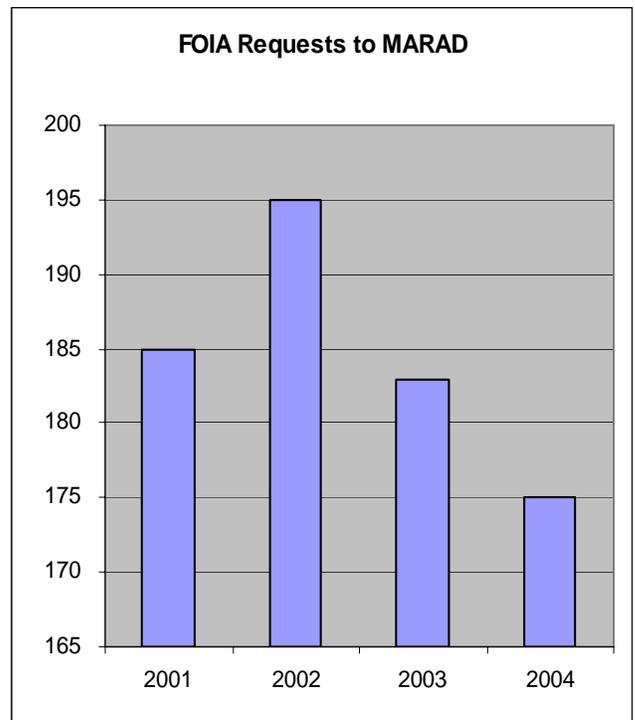
J. Riddick, FOIA Coordinator

"I wouldn't go back to the old way of doing things," said Riddick. "Now, I spend less time at the copier and in program offices and more time at my desk responding to inquiries from requestors."



Jeannette Riddick, FOIA Coordinator

FOIA Fact





Taking IT To Sea

As U.S. Maritime Administration IT consolidates to the DOT Common Operating Environment, MARAD's Ready Reserve Force (RRF) is undergoing an even broader program of technological upgrades.

MARAD's fleet of 60+ ships has successfully fulfilled its mission in the past with surprising little on-board information technology. But thanks to the tireless and visionary work of a number of MARAD team members and vendors, on-board IT will soon begin delivering operational benefits to the ships' crews, their support teams in the regions and headquarters, and the Military Sealift Command.

"During the Persian Gulf actions of the early 1990s, we started identifying how technology could better serve the RRF's mission," says Dick Williams, Chief, Division of Logistics Support, Office of Ship Operations. "We've made significant advances since then, and some of the more dramatic changes are now being implemented."

Williams, along with Senior Program Managers Channing Jones and James Fox, lead the effort to utilize technology in advancing the RRF's capabilities. Fox led the business process effort that identified needs and the best ways to address them and began the actual implementation; Jones is managing the ongoing effort to better connect the RRF to MARAD technologically.

Ready Reserve Force

Most MARAD employees know the RRF exists to support the military in matters of national security, humanitarian assistance, emergency response, and tance, though few are familiar with the fleet's operational details.

RRF ships include training vessels, tankers, roll-on/roll-off vehicle carriers, container carriers and specialized crane ships. Strategically outposted along the coast lines of the United States and at the Reserve Fleet sites at James River, Va., Beaumont, Texas, and Suisun Bay, Calif., the ships are each maintained by small (6-10 member) crews, each led by a chief engineer, that keep the ships in top operating condition. When the Military Sealift Command notifies MARAD that a ship must be activated, the chief engineer and crew have from 4-20 days, depending on the particular ship, to assemble their seagoing crew and have the ship provisioned and ready to serve.

Most of these ships have had several independent computer workstations for some time, supporting various operational aspects such as ship maintenance, repair part inventories, management reporting, and more. These workstations, however,

were not connected to one another and did not adequately support the needs of the crew or their supervisors ashore.



RRF ships will use satellite communications to transmit logistics data to Headquarters—Dick Williams

Preparing to Serve

"When we looked at the process of readiness preparation, we knew technology would play a big part in moving the ships forward," said Fox.

The first initiative was to get commonly configured servers on board every ship in the RRF and ensure that those servers could support sharing key information with headquarters and the regions. Next, reporting processes and tools were put in place, which also involved a continuing effort to assign ships "@dot.gov" e-mail addresses. Ultimately, the

ships will each have their own networks that connect all the ship's functions, better support the needs of the crew, and facilitate easier interaction with support teams ashore.

"We're implementing the first set of upgrades now," said Fox. "But the most dramatic changes for the ships are yet to come."

On-Board Networking

Williams and his team are endeavoring to build wireless networks on board each MARAD ship. While wireless networking on board a ship presents unique challenges, including the potential effect on certain types of cargo, it also offers big operational gains.

For example, giving an engineer ready access to parts inventories from any point on the ship (via a networked laptop) can not only make identifying correct replacement parts easier and faster, but it can also facilitate better parts inventory management involving storage facilities ashore. On-board networking also allows for more strategic use of security equipment and cameras, diagnostic equipment, management reporting tools, communications with the assigned ship manager and MARAD Headquarters while activated, and more.

Vision Helps

Williams, Jones, and Fox credit MARAD's senior leadership and the Office of the CIO for providing the visionary support needed to address some of the RRF's critical operational issues. While the overarching need for improvements was first recognized in the early 1990s and the need for technological solutions was identified in 2000, the dramatic changes began taking place in the fall of 2004 and will continue for several years.

Given the impact of sweeping technology enhancements occurring and planned for the RRF, MARAD's consolidation to the DOT Common Operating Environment looks relatively mild. But as with any change, good planning and execution plus general open-mindedness make the benefits well worth the inconvenience.

"We've made significant advances..."
Dick Williams

"But the most dramatic changes for the ships are yet to come."
James Fox



Consolidation is Here: How Will IT Affect YOU?

The President's Management Agenda calls upon all government agencies to become more customer-centered, results-oriented, and market-based. With the adoption of a common IT operating environment, MARAD is on the road to becoming an integral part of the Department's business change. While people sometimes resist change, MARAD will find many reasons to embrace the new computer standards as part of DOT's Common Operating Environment (COE).



Consolidation brings many benefits

By ensuring that all desktops are configured with the same media player tool, we eliminate the need for support specialists to know the ins-and-outs of three programs. Some users may need to become acquainted with standard tools that are new to them. Each tool in the standard desktop was selected in part for its ease of use and, if needed, the help desk is well prepared to help users get quickly comfortable with new applications and tools.

For MARAD users, the changes will mean more current computer hardware and software, more accountable IT support, more technology for more efficiency, and more consistency of IT service delivery among headquarters-based and remote MARAD employees.

"This is clearly a change for the better," said MARAD Assistant CIO Louis Effa. "Once people get used to the new way of getting things done, they'll see the benefits and embrace the change."

Help Desk

The biggest specific change for most team members will be dialing a central number for help desk support. A five-digit extension from headquarters and a remote 800-number will connect users to a central help desk staffed with helpful and knowledgeable support specialists.

The new environment will ensure quick responses to team member needs. Service Level Agreements (SLAs) require that all help desk calls be answered within 30 seconds and last no more than 15 minutes. If a user's issue requires more attention, it is escalated from Tier 1 service to Tier 2, where more complex issues are handled at the desk-side. Depending on the priority level of the issue, almost all Tier 2 responses will occur within 30 to 120 minutes and be resolved within 2 to 12 hours. Remember, though, that the majority of help desk calls will remain Tier 1 issues that are resolved within 15 minutes.

Under the old environment, standard response times did not exist. While MARAD team members enjoyed solid help desk support in the past, the future promises to be even brighter. A major reason is a concept called the standard desktop.

Standard Desktop

With the move to the COE, all desktop computers will be configured with a standard set of tools. This standard desktop configuration addresses the common needs of the vast majority of users. By standardizing the way everyone's computer is configured, we also standardize the knowledge requirements of our help desk team. For example, *Windows Media Player*, *Real Player*, and *Quick Time* allow users to play media, such as video and audio.

In cases where the standard desktop does not meet a particular need, the team member can request a specific application. A simple process will review the need and respond appropriately to enable every team member to efficiently complete required tasks.

"There's a perception among team members that they won't be able to do as much in the new environment," Effa said. But with the standard desktop and enforceable SLAs in place for the help desk function, he is confident the new environment will result in more efficiency and better service delivery.

Other Benefits

The new operating environment will also be more secure. As the DOT network is "locked-down," issues related to viruses and intrusions can be better managed, eliminating slow-downs and untimely maintenance actions that can affect every user.

In addition, consolidation to the COE means

that every user will get a new computer every three years. While every user's e-mail storage allotment will remain at the industry-standard 100 MB, the standard desktop includes 40 GB of hard drive storage, which represents a significant increase for many. To make the most of available storage, training will be offered in how to archive files and e-mail messages, and how to use a new file-sharing tool to avoid e-mail overload.

All Things Considered...

While change is almost never easy, positive change can be surprisingly pleasant. The benefits of consolidation to the COE promise to blossom very quickly. MARAD team members get ready. Change is coming, but it brings a wave of progress that will keep us in step with the President's Management Agenda--better serving the needs of our customers, the citizens of the United States.



DOT Common Operating Environment—Louis Effa

"This is clearly a change for the better."
Louis Effa
To keep pace with the consolidation efforts, visit the CIO web site at
<http://intramarad.dot.gov/cioweb>



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IT's All About You!

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Our Vision

As the key partner to MARAD business owners, the MARAD Office of the CIO is the supplier of high-value, innovative and relevant IT solutions. We are enterprise conscious while being responsive to our partners' unique needs. Our solutions advance the Marine Transportation System (MTS) and increase workforce productivity. We conduct ourselves ethically and honestly, making deliberate decisions that drive ingenuity and measurable results for our business partners.

Putting IT to Work for You (Tips and Tricks)

It's not magic, but the use of macros can make you feel like you have a separate pair of hands. With just a few strokes you can program complicated or repetitive keystrokes into one easy action. Are you using macros to save time and increase productivity? Tell us how and we'll share it with your co-workers in the next issue of *MARAD IT Newsletter*. Send your macro tricks to MARADITeditor@dot.gov.

A great resource for learning is Microsoft's Office Assistance Website: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/assistance/>

Steps for assigning a macro key to execute a menu command:

1. On the **Tools** menu, click **Customize**.
2. Click **Keyboard**.
3. In the **Save changes Inbox**, click the current document name or [template](#) in which you want to save the macro key changes.

Measuring IT

(What have we done for you lately?)

Week Ending	June 29	August 12
Calls Received	314	251
Calls Completed	208	194
Increase/(Decrease) Rate	-2%	-22%
Calls from Headquarters	196	161
Calls from Regions	118	80
Issues: Hardware	-	-
Software	-	-
Network	-	-
General Customer Support	257	186
Call Completion Rate	66%	77%

IT's Happening at MARAD

(and what about tomorrow?)

- Jul 2005: Email migration to DOT COE
- Aug–Sep 2005: PC Replacement
- Jul–Dec 2005: Help Desk Migration to DOT COE
- Sep–Dec 2005: Desktop Migration to DOT COE