

## E-Mail: Making it Work for You

As you become active in the Coast Guard Auxiliary, one of the first changes you will see is the increase in E-mail you will be receiving. In years past, the Postal Service delivery person was the first to notice your new interest, now the change is most noticeable in the increased volume of E-mail. You will receive E-mail just about every day, sometimes several pieces of mail each day. So . . . let's address some things to think about.

Your address:

- You may want to consider changing your Coast Guard Auxiliary address to something other than what you use for your general E-mail. This automatically places all Auxiliary mail in a separate account. This can be good, but places the burden upon you to check this account daily and reply promptly to the mail received in it.
- You may choose to use your regular address for a number of reasons, but you may want to start placing all your Auxiliary mail in a separate file folder after it is received. This makes retrieval at a later date easier as it is all together (much as it would be if you had an Auxiliary address).
- You could also choose to print all your E-mails and file them in a folder or notebook, however this is not recommended. It uses prodigious amounts of paper, and since you have a computer it is better to let the computer manage your mail for you. You most likely have an option to save the mail to your computer which enables transfer to disc at a future date, a much more economical solution.

E-mail has greatly facilitated communication in the Auxiliary. However, it can be debated whether it is a boon or boondoggle! We want to help you make it a boon. As you file and retrieve mail at a later date you will discover the importance of good subject lines. Be sure they reflect what the topic of the mail is about. It is very frustrating to search for something you know you received when the topic is not mentioned in any subject lines you can find. You must then open each piece of mail and visually scan it to find out if that is the one you are looking for.

Think about who needs to receive any mail you write. Yes, it is easy to send copies to everyone, but also be sure that is appropriate. If you were sending the same mail via the post office, would you be willing to place a stamp (with money for that stamp out of your own pocket) on it and mail it to everyone listed on the electronic mail? You should be, or that name should be deleted. The chain of leadership and management dictates who should receive copies of what you write. You send to only your "boss" (one level up from your position), not your "boss", his "boss", and so on up. If you are an FC and receive something from the DCP, you should pass it on to your members (forward it to those under you). You do not need to add comments; you do need to pass the information on. The same holds true for our staff positions, if the DSO sends something to all SOs, they in turn need to send it on to all FSOs. If you happen to receive multiple copies of the same information, check to be sure it is the same, and if it is, delete the second copy and do not forward it again. Stop unneeded proliferation and duplication.

E-mail is communication with your friends. Be friendly, be respectful, and be kind. Use capital letters at the beginning of sentences; use periods at the end. Be sure to turn on and use spell check, grammar check, and all the other kinds of help built into these expensive computers we are using. Remember, you are writing to mature adults – most do not use text messaging on a regular basis, so spell words out and avoid extensive use of abbreviations and acronyms. Write as if your grade school English teacher was going to read it. The reader should not have to guess at what you intended to say. Since they can only read what you have written, try to be explicit and complete in what you write. If you are upset when you write a message, it is best to save it until the next day without hitting the send key. Recipients only see what you wrote, and the words imply a meaning in their head – not necessarily the meaning you intended. So it is always smart to reread what you have written - before you send it - if you are angry or giving a response you know will not be well received. Perhaps a phone call would be better than an E-mail. That way you both can contribute and you can hear the inflection in the voice as well. We want to build bridges, not burn them.

Each internet provider has hints on how to handle E-mail. Read those hints and follow what seems to assist you. Learn how to attach documents. Learn how to find and read attachments. Learn how to forward mail received, deleting names of previous recipients. Some E-mails you will want to print, and having to print 3 pages of names of people who have also received it is frustrating and a waste of paper. Learn about sending CC (copies) or BCC (blind copies) and when each is appropriate. Develop your own address book (on line) and set up groups for those people you regularly need to send mail to, i.e. all members of your Flotilla, all FSO-MTs, etc. If you still have questions after consulting with your provider's recommendations, don't hesitate to contact your FSO-CS or SO-CS officer. They should be able to give you whatever one-on-one help you need.

Remember, E-mail is facilitating the business of the U S Coast Guard Auxiliary. As such, you will never provide members E-mail addresses to any person or business outside the Auxiliary. You will not use addresses to send spam, chain letters, daily jokes or even inspirational thoughts. Use it strictly to conduct Auxiliary business in a respectful manner. It is a wonderful tool that can take days off completing projects when compared to sending things through the postal service. It makes a demanding job, like DCP or FC, much easier. It allows our members to receive information in a timely manner. It can be a blessing when used correctly. Enjoy its benefits and beware of the problems it can create.

Be part of a solution, not part of a problem.