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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

INTERNATIONAL DIVISION

FEB 9 1982

Admiral H.E. Shear
Maritime Administrator
Maritime Administration

Dear Admiral Shear:

Subject: Improvements Can Be Made In U.S.
Mariners Special Warning System

We have completed our review of actions taken on recommendations made in our 1976 report 1/ on the need to institutionalize and formalize the U.S. Mariners Special Warning System. We found that our recommendations were implemented and the mechanisms for issuing Special Warnings in a timely manner are in place. The State Department Office of Maritime Affairs, which is responsible for deciding on the issuance and timing of Special Warnings, had generally met its responsibilities in this regard. That Office, however, does not routinely document the decisionmaking process leading to the issuance of a Special Warning. It would be very helpful to any management review, both internal or external, if the decisionmaking process was so documented. We believe the Office of Maritime Affairs should document the decisionmaking process relating to the issuance of Special Warnings.

Geographic boundaries and instructions to acknowledge receipt of Special Warnings by mariners in the affected area are supposed to be included in the Special Warning text by the Department of Defense's Defense Mapping Agency whose facilities are used to transmit the Warning. The Department of Transportation Maritime Administration, through the facility of its U.S. Merchant Vessel Filing Locator System, is supposed to follow up to ensure that mariners acknowledge receipt of the Warnings. We found that acknowledgment instructions in some instances did not identify the specific geographic boundaries within which vessels were expected to respond, and the acknowledgment instructions were not included on copies of Special Warnings sent to merchant vessel companies. We also found that the Maritime Administration does not routinely follow up to ensure that mariners received the Warning.

1/ "System to Warn U.S. Mariners of Potential Political/Military Hazards: S.S. Mayaguez, a Case Study" (ID-76-33, Feb. 11, 1976).

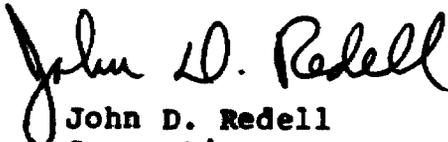


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To enhance the effectiveness and reliability of the Special Warning System, we believe the Maritime Administration should make every effort to ensure receipt of Special Warnings. We also believe the Defense Mapping Agency should fulfill its responsibilities concerning acknowledgment instructions.

This letter is also being sent today to the Director, Office of Maritime Affairs; and the Director, Defense Mapping Agency.

Sincerely yours,


John D. Redell
Group Director