

## NAVAIR's Varmall Chats with Sailors and Marines at the 2004 EIE

**A**t this year's Environmental Information Exchange (EIE), Herman Varmall from the Naval Air Systems Command's (NAVAIR) Program Support Department (AIR-1.1) sat down to chat with many of the sailors and Marines in attendance. He wanted to gather the Fleet's perceptions about NAVAIR, find out what was on their minds and figure out how NAVAIR could help them. The following is a summary of those conversations:

In my mind, this year's EIE was a resounding success. Not because of the great weather in Florida and not because we had over 140 in attendance. It was because our most valued customer—the Fleet—showed up. Over seventy enlisted Navy and Marine Corps personnel attended this year's event at the Officers Club in Jacksonville, FL. As the sponsor of this event for the past six years, this is what it is all about—engaging the Fleet in a discussion of their environmental challenges. I was overwhelmed when I stood up in a room overflowing with sailors and Marines to ask, "What can we (NAVAIR) do to help you? Talk to us. Tell us your issues. We will work together to help reduce your environmental risks."

On the first day of the conference, I made sure that the Fleet understood that we (NAVAIR) are here for them. I challenged everyone in the room to seize the opportunity—take advantage of the next three days to share, network, and exchange ideas. My goal was to personally "meet and greet" each and every one of them—something I was able to accomplish. I quickly realized that interviewing over seventy sailors and Marines during the course of a three-



Herman Varmall.

day meeting was not feasible although I was able to complete a substantial number of interviews.

I believe that the Fleet assembled at this year's EIE were very open to talk, listen and learn. I also sensed that they were pleased with the information we were providing and our genuine interest in addressing their concerns and challenges. The majority of the folks I interviewed were ready to talk. Many of them, from different sites, shared many of the same concerns.



The first thing I learned from my one-on-one conversations with the Fleet is that they do not understand NAVAIR. They don't know what we do. They were wondering, "Who is NAVAIR? What is NAVAIR doing for me? What should NAVAIR be doing for me?"

Our own customer—our most important customer—does not know who we are. The sailors and Marines I spoke with feel as though we have lost touch with their needs. Furthermore, our customer does not believe that anyone is listening. So, our customers are doing whatever it takes to keep operations moving—without our help. Our customer feels as though the System Commands should send folks to the deck plate level to communicate with the Fleet—to understand what they're going through, the problems they're dealing with. They want to know that we understand their issues and are dedicated to solving them. They would like us to leverage whatever resources are available to help them minimize their environmental risks. Bottom line, they need to know we are out there and how can they get in touch with us.

Many of the civilian attendees at this year's EIE represented various competencies and programs within NAVAIR—they are some of our best people. Fortunately, I was able to use some of these folks as examples of how NAVAIR is currently supporting the Fleet.

For example, Lynn Cahoon and Ken LaVere are managing our new technology transition program called NATIP (Naval Aviation Technology Integration Program). We established this program to allow for the seamless transition of

new technologies (equipment, materials, etc.) from our laboratories into the hands of the Fleet. Once our laboratories have validated a technology, NATIP ensures that:

- Approval from the appropriate cognizant field activity has been granted,
- The appropriate maintenance manuals are updated, and
- The approved materials and/or equipment are accessible by the Fleet.

Kevin Kovaleski, Scott Mauro and others at the EIE are part of the Customer Support Group (CSG). This group of engineers and logisticians makes regular visits to maintenance activities across NAVAIR to identify existing environmental challenges and provide Fleet personnel with real-time, approved solutions. The CSG is another great example of where NAVAIR is providing service to the Fleet.

I was able to use these and other folks to exemplify the responsibilities of the various competencies within NAVAIR and the products and services they provide for the Fleet. As I was chatting with sailors and Marines, I could see "the light come on." I could almost hear them say, "Oh, that's what NAVAIR does." It was apparent to me that no one had ever spent the time explaining NAVAIR to them.

In addition to their general perceptions about NAVAIR, I also got into some specifics with the Fleet. Most of the particular issues on the minds of the Fleet fell into the following categories:

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## Training

“Training, training, and more training.” That’s what I heard for three days. It became very apparent to me that the current training curriculum (A-school, B-school and platform-specific training) does not adequately address the Fleet’s environmental and hazardous material requirements. Fleet personnel are not exposed to environmental awareness unless it is part of their specific job function. There is a real and immediate need to have environmental, hazardous waste, and/or hazardous materials management curricula integrated into existing Fleet training programs. And this training should occur at the supervisory and deck plate levels.

In addition, the Fleet is not empowered to keep up with the ever-changing environmental regulatory landscape (since it shifts from one station to the next, inside and outside the Continental United States, etc.). The Fleet would like to have access to a matrix of environmental laws that they can “sort” by region, state, etc. depending on their current assignment. Generally, the sailors and Marines I spoke with are looking for more help to comply with environmental laws.

## Resources

The Fleet appears to be generally unaware of the range of resources that are available to them. Overall, they lack an awareness of the training that is offered to address their environmental management responsibilities. Also, they are not aware of the pollution prevention equipment that can be procured for their activities. Finally, they lack a direct connec-



tion with the people who can help them with environmentally compliant substitute materials, technologies and processes for the hazardous materials they are currently using.

## The Lead Maintenance Technology Center for the Environment (LMTCE) Working Integrated Product Team (WIPT)

For the Fleet personnel who were aware of the LMTCE WIPT, it is valued as a key resource. But overall, the Fleet would like to have greater access to the WIPT and use its services more often. At a minimum, the Fleet believes the LMTCE WIPT could be their primary entry point into the

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NAVAIR community. The past six EIEs seemed to have increased the awareness of the LMTCE WIPT in the minds of the Fleet.

## Naval Air Technical Data and Engineering Service Command (NATEC) Technical Representatives

There was much discussion during the course of the EIE and in my one-on-one conversations with the Fleet about the pending elimination of the NATEC “Tech Reps.” This was not a popular decision with the Fleet. The Fleet feels that, overall, the “Tech Reps” provided a much needed resource. If lost, the Fleet feels that it would significantly impact their operations and worker safety. In addition, the Fleet believes that significant cost impacts will be realized in the training area if this resource is lost. They’re left wondering where they will get the assistance that the “Tech Reps” provided.

## Naval Aviation Maintenance Program (NAMP)

The Fleet regards the NAMP as their “bible” for maintenance planning and operations and would like to see a section added on environmental operations and procedures.

## National Stock Numbers Cross-referenced to Part Numbers

Typical materials and supplies taken on board ships to support aviation systems are typically ordered by National Stock Number (NSN) designation. Manufacturer part

numbers identify many of the newer systems material/parts/supplies. The sailors and Marines need a way to translate manufacturer part numbers to NSNs.

## Materials with Longer Shelf Lives

On many occasions, the materials used for corrosion control have exceeded their shelf life prior to opening. The Fleet has a need for extending shelf life or ensuring that the stock system does not provide materials with expired shelf lives.

## Substitutes

The Fleet is not aware of many of the alternative/substitute materials and processes being developed at various NAVAIR laboratories. We need to do a better job of keeping the Fleet informed of the innovative maintenance technologies (processes and materials) that are being developed in our laboratories and transitioned by the LMTCE WIPT and other parties.

These conversations with the Fleet were a real education for me. These chats continue to inspire me to do more to increase the awareness of NAVAIR in their eyes and, more importantly, provide the products and services they need to minimize their environmental risks. 

*U.S. Navy photos by PH3 Johanna L. English, Regional Visual Information Support Center (RVISC), Naval Air Station Jacksonville, FL.*

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