

## PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD ACHIEVES VPP STAR STATUS

The 279-acre Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNS) is located in Kittery, Maine, a deepwater port on the New England coast, across the river from Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Behind the gates, the government's oldest continuously operating shipyard, which was established in 1800, is a bustling industrial city with a historic district that includes the home built for Commodore Isaac Hull, the shipyard's first Commanding Officer.



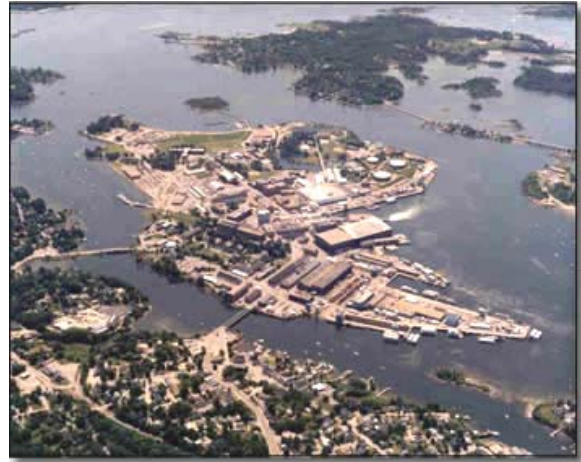
Commodore Hull

and sunk a mighty British warship.

The *USS Constitution*, a beloved part of American history, was saved from the scrapheap in 1833 by Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem, *Old Ironsides*. Twice during her long life, the *USS Constitution*, still remembered as *Old Ironsides*, was rebuilt and repaired at PNS.

Today, PNS is a Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) shipyard that rapidly turns around submarines that go there for repair, overhaul, or modernization.

Shipyard employees work on everything from welding cracks and machining parts to traveling to other Navy shipyards to share their experience and know-how.



Aerial view of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard

Hull was already a hero of the War of 1812 before arriving at Portsmouth. As captain of the U.S. Frigate *Constitution*, Hull defeated the British in an 1812 naval battle near Boston. When British cannonballs bounced harmlessly off the triumphant *Constitution*, her cheering crew conferred on her the nickname, *Old Ironsides*. It was an impressive victory for the fledgling republic, and the American cause was rejuvenated on learning that the *Constitution* had defeated



USS Constitution – “Old Ironsides”

PNS also serves as a model of safety excellence. The shipyard was selected as a Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) *Star* site by the U.S.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in 2005. It was the first Navy facility to achieve VPP *Star* status, which PNS achieved in just 18 months. PNS earned its *Star* status after an OSHA review of the shipyard's safety

programs and practices that excel in preventing work-related injuries and illnesses and in reducing PNS's lost-time injury rate to less than half the national average for the

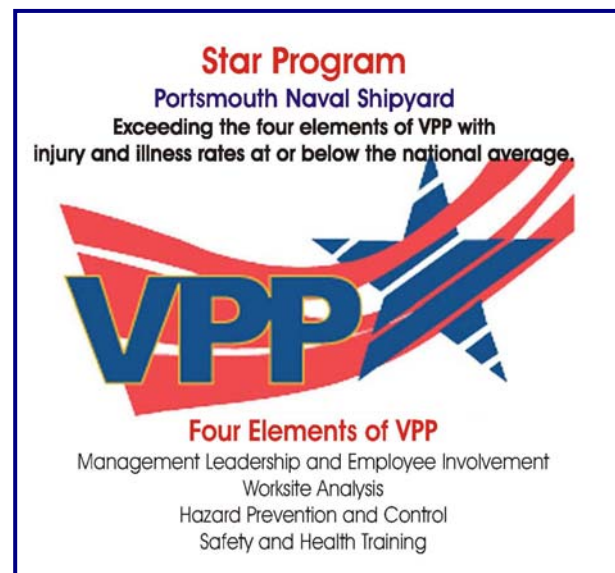
shipbuilding and repair industry. PNS held a special ceremony in March 2005 to celebrate its VPP *Star* award. More than 1,000 shipyard employees, local residents, and dignitaries attended.

OSHA protects the safety and health of workers through enforcement of occupational safety and health regulations; outreach, education, and compliance assistance; and cooperative programs. VPP is an OSHA cooperative program that rewards employers with outstanding workplace safety and health programs that control hazards and protect workers.

OSHA approves successful employers by designating them to one of three VPP program levels: *Star*, *Merit*, or *Star Demonstration*. *Star* is the highest VPP level. The VPP *Star* award designation indicates that the organization receiving the award has exceeded the four basic VPP elements shown at right. These



Speakers VPP "Star" Celebration – Portsmouth Naval Shipyard 25 March 2005 - (l to r) CAPT Kevin McCoy, Asst. Deputy CDR of Industrial Operations, NAVSEA; Congressman Jeb Bradley, NH; Congressman Tom Allen, ME; Mr. Paul O'Connor, Pres. Federal Employees Metal Trades Council; CAPT Jonathan Iverson, CDR PNSY; Mr. Jonathan Snare, Acting Asst. Secy. Of Labor OSH; Ms. Marthe Kent, Regn'l. Admin., OSHA; Ms. Connie DeWitte, DASN(Safety); VADM Phillip Balisle, CDR NAVSEA.



employers have exceptional management systems and programs that prevent occupational injuries and illnesses. A designated *Star* site must have had all of its occupational safety and health program elements operating effectively for at least one year, and its injury and accident rates must be below the national average for that industry.



PNS provides homeport support for Coast Guard Cutters.

PNS derives numerous benefits from being a VPP *Star* site. Because PNS has taken its occupational safety and health programs well beyond the minimum regulatory requirements, OSHA has removed the shipyard from its programmed inspection list. Shipyard workers, however, lose none of their rights; OSHA is required to continue to respond to reports of major mishaps, valid employee complaints, and chemical spill incidents. Additional advantages include fewer work-related injuries and illnesses, improved employee morale, and reduced costs. The entire shipbuilding and repair industry benefits from the PNS model of excellence that influences safety and health practices industrywide.

Employee involvement is a cornerstone of VPP. OSHA's conferring of VPP *Star* status on PNS is an official recognition of the outstanding efforts of PNS management, union leadership, safety staff, and employees who teamed up to establish and maintain their excellent safety and health

record. "As a *Star* site, you serve as a model for excellence in safety and health," affirmed Jonathan Snare, Acting Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA, in presenting the VPP *Star* award to the men and women who have



The submarine USS Pittsburgh (SSN 720) at PNS for an engineering overhaul.

made PNS's *Star* award possible. "We are pleased to recognize your outstanding achievement."

Addressing those in attendance at the March 2005 celebration of the selection of PNS as a VPP *Star* site, Vice Admiral Phillip M.



Balisle, Commander of NAVSEA, praised PNS for setting the standard for other Navy commands. "In a most complex environment, a look at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard's safety program is very telling," declared Balisle. "One sees a safety program that has earned the Secretary of the Navy's and Chief of Naval Operations' Installation Excellence Awards for Safety, and that has made Portsmouth the safest of our four safety-conscious shipyards." Balisle continued, "I see an organization whose lifeblood program--its safety program--is making great strides. It is taking care of its people, and those people are producing our ships at lower costs, on short timelines, and at a standard-setting quality of excellence."

Connie DeWitte, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Safety, added, "What a remarkable achievement. The Secretary of the Navy and I are



PNS is the lead shipyard for the 688 Class of submarine such as the City of Corpus Christi (SSN 705) shown here.

extremely proud of the entire shipyard team - the leadership, the safety staff, and especially the men and women of the waterfront, working to embed safety into all that you do. Look at the rewards; look at the results."

DeWitte had visited PNS less than two years earlier to present the Secretary of the Navy's Safety Award. "I was quite impressed then," recalled DeWitte. "What is significant is that you started out with an already excellent program and improved on it."

The safety of their workforce is a shared responsibility at all the Navy's shipyards. Under the *One Shipyard* initiative, PNS leadership is sharing its learning experience and progress toward VPP status with other naval shipyards.

Launched in 1797, the *USS Constitution, Old Ironsides*, was berthed at PNS nearly two decades before returning to Boston in 1877, where she remains homeported today. She's the Navy's oldest commissioned warship and the oldest commissioned warship afloat anywhere in the world. The three-year younger Portsmouth Naval Shipyard also lives on, as one of the safest repair facilities in the United States.

Two additional shipyards, Norfolk Naval Shipyard and Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, submitted their applications to OSHA for VPP membership. They were inspected by OSHA, and both were also recommended for OSHA's VPP

Star Status. Look for separate stories on this website about these safety successes.

For more information on OSHA's Voluntary Protection Program, how to qualify, a VPP eligibility checklist and VPP application, visit these websites:

OSHA VPP

<http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/>

VPP Participants' Association

<http://www.vpppa.org/>

VPP Eligibility Checklist

<http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/vppflyer.pdf>

VPP Information Kit

[http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/VPP\\_Kit.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/VPP_Kit.pdf)

VPP Application Information, OSHA Instruction TED 8.4

[http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/Directive\\_pdf/TED\\_8\\_4.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/Directive_pdf/TED_8_4.pdf)

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