



# UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

## **MARINE SAFETY ALERT**

Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security and Stewardship

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Washington, DC

Alert 2-08

### **CHANTIX MEDICAL ADVISORY FOR MERCHANT MARINERS**

On May 21, 2008, the Institute for Safe Medication Practices released a report on side effects and concerns associated with the use of Chantix (varenicline). Chantix is a medication used to help patients quit smoking. To date, over four million prescriptions have been written in the United States.

The Institute for Safe Medication Practices report states the following: There are immediate safety concerns about the use of Chantix among persons operating aircraft, trains, buses, and other vehicles, or in other settings where a lapse in alertness or motor control could lead to massive, serious injury. Other examples include persons operating nuclear power reactors, high-rise construction cranes or life-sustaining medical devices. Based on reports of sudden loss of consciousness, seizures, muscle spasms, vision disturbances, hallucinations, paranoia and psychosis, Chantix may not be safe to use in these settings. The extent to which Chantix has already contributed to accidental death and injury has not been fully investigated and reported. For additional information access - <http://www.ismp.org/docs/vareniclineStudy.asp> .

Although not specifically mentioned in the report, the maritime domain is one setting where lapses in alertness or motor control can have catastrophic results. The safety of the maritime community and the public, and the protection of the environment are paramount. Ensuring that medications prescribed do not put mariners and others at increased risk of injury or death is essential.

The Coast Guard reminds all maritime industry personnel that mariners should not perform a safety-sensitive function on any vessel while under the influence of any substance that may negatively impact their performance. To that end, mariners are strongly warned that some prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, vitamins and dietary supplements, alone or in combination with other substances, may adversely affect an individual's ability to perform critical functions and place the individual at risk of sudden incapacitation. Mariners should seek the advice of their healthcare provider before taking any medications, vitamins or dietary supplements.

If you are currently taking or have recently discontinued the use of Chantix, we strongly recommend that you consult with your healthcare provider to discuss potential side effects and your job performance requirements. You and your healthcare provider should be alert to and monitor for all physical and psychological changes that may affect your performance, both while taking this medication as well as during the withdrawal period. If you are experiencing any of the psychiatric, cardiologic, musculoskeletal or visual side effects associated with Chantix, you should immediately cease performance of all duties related to your mariner credentials and contact your healthcare provider.

Questions regarding this notice may be addressed to Lieutenant Junior Grade Elizabeth Braker, Medical Evaluation Branch, Coast Guard National Maritime Center at (304) 433-3656 or [Elizabeth.L.Braker@uscg.mil](mailto:Elizabeth.L.Braker@uscg.mil).

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