

From left, Larry Howard (227) and Ramon Cordero (227), two of Electric Boat's first-shift roving tank watches, review a list of tank entrants.



Roving Employees Enhance Tank Safety

Electric Boat has made a smooth transition to its new two-way emergency radio system for tank entrants, and supervisors are giving much of the credit to EB's roving tank watches.

Don Raffo (341), a marine chemist who runs EB's Confined Spaces Safety Program, said the roving tank watches were established when the Lifeline Monitoring System was put into daily use in mid-2001.

The roving tank watches, unlike the fixed watches assigned to a specific tank, spend their day going from tank to tank, checking in with the regular tank watches as well as the employees working within the confined spaces. The rovers ensure that everyone's radios are functioning properly and that they understand how to use them. The rovers also help issue the radios to each tank entrant at the beginning of the shift.

"Having these rovers made the whole system work much smoother," Raffo said, "because they were able to deal with a lot of the issues, a lot of the questions and a lot of the problems, or they could just help people learn how to use it."

"It's not a bad job," said Larry Howard

(227), who serves as a first-shift roving tank watch two days a week. "I make my rounds, and wherever the guys are working, I'll go to them and make sure everything is fine. That's what they like about the system – the roving tank watch comes up there and checks on them."

"He's very conscientious," said John Tucker, Howard's foreman. "Even during lunch sometimes, if a guy's radio goes into alarm because he forgot to put it in break mode, Larry will go find the guy, make sure he's not in the tank and make sure it's not an emergency."

The Lifeline radios serve as an added safety cushion for tank entrants by giving them the ability to communicate with EB's Casualty Control office in an emergency. The radios also help "check" on the user by requiring the push of a button every hour. If the button is not pushed, an alarm is sounded, which would quickly bring a roving tank watch to the scene. The rover, in direct communication with CasCon, is then able to confirm or deny the need for medical help from the EB Fire Department.

"The company is very interested in everyone's safety, and I think that's a good thing,"

said Ramon Cordero (227), another of EB's roving tank watches.

Use of the Lifeline radios by tank entrants became mandatory on the Jimmy Carter (SSN23) and Virginia-class boats in April, making the work of the rovers that much more critical.

"These guys are doing a great job," said Tom Anderson (242), president of the Boilermakers Union local. "It's a big responsibility they have."

Steel trades Superintendent Ron Donovan said employees have embraced the new system, which also helped its implementation.

"The successful transitioning to the Lifeline system is a credit to all the mechanics involved as system users," he said. "Without their commitment and feedback, we'd still be struggling to resolve startup issues."

"The roving tank watches have added a new dimension of ownership and responsibility to this process," Donovan continued. "They have done a tremendous job opening up communication and continually look for areas of opportunity to improve the process."

