Navy to End Ban on Women in Submarines

If everything goes according to plan, women could begin serving on U.S. Navy submarines sometime in 2011. The Navy is set to end its ban on women on subs because the time has come to "provide more opportunities for women."

Women have served on Navy ships since 1993. But submarines are a different story. Life on a sub is different from life on a ship. Subs are very cramped, and there is little privacy. Groups of sailors sleep in tiny bunk rooms that are the size of walk-in closets. As many as 150 sailors might share two bathrooms that have a total of four showers and seven toilets. A crew might have to live in those conditions for seven months at a time. A sub might be underwater for as long as 75 days at a time.

NEWS WORD BOX

officers   according
privacy   schedule
service   opportunities

The Navy has a detailed plan for bringing women aboard submarines. Putting women on subs is only fair, Navy leaders say. What works on ships can work in subs, they add.

Women will be added first to the larger submarines in the Navy's 71 sub fleet. The first women on board will probably be officers, because officers already have separate living quarters. Then women will be added to crews too. Space will have to be made for them. There will always be at least two women on a sub, according to the plan.

Navy leaders are all "on board" with the plan to open up subs to women. So are most of the sailors. "If women can be on space shuttles and on ships, I think they ought to be able to work on submarines," said one sailor who recently retired from the Navy after 20 years of service.

If the Navy's plan moves ahead on schedule, a woman might command an entire sub within the next 20 years.

MORE FACTS ABOUT WOMEN AND SUBS
- About 330,000 people serve in the U.S. Navy; more than 50,000 of them are women.
- Women are already allowed to serve on subs in some countries, including Australia, Canada, Norway, Spain, and Sweden.

THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

How do you feel about the Navy's plan? Is it a good idea or a bad idea?
Explain your answer.