

Safety Corner

What is ISM Code?

Chapter IX of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) requires compliance with the Safety Management (ISM) Code, which is an international standard whose purpose is to prevent pollution at sea as well as loss of marine life, ensure safety at sea, prevent human injury or loss of life, and avoid damage to the environment and to the ship. In 1998, the ISM Code became mandatory for three types of vessels, regardless of the date of construction:

1. Passenger ships including passenger high-speed craft on international voyages;
2. Oil tankers, chemical tankers, gas carriers, bulk carriers and cargo high-speed craft of 500 gross tonnage and upwards on international voyages; and
3. Other cargo ships and mobile offshore drilling units of 500 gross tonnage and upwards on international voyages.

By 2002 almost all of the international shipping community was required to comply with the ISM Code. In order to comply with the ISM Code, each ship class must have a working Safety Management System (SMS) that consists of the following elements:

- Commitment from top management and a top tier policy manual
- A procedures manual that documents operations on board the ship, during normal operations and in emergency situations
- Procedures for conducting both internal and external audits to ensure the ship is doing what is documented in the procedures manual
- A designated person ashore to serve as the link between the ships and shore staff, and to verify the SMS implementation
- A system for identifying where actual practices do not meet those that are documented and for implementing associated corrective action
- Regular management reviews
- The ship must be maintained in conformity with the provisions of relevant rules and regulations and with any additional requirements which may be established by the company

The ISM Code requires that safeguards be established against the safety and pollution risks involved in shipboard operations, while giving the flexibility to develop and tailor a SMS to an owner's/ship manager's specific operation while complying with regulatory requirements. Responsibility for this is placed firmly on the companies charged with the ship's management.

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