

No. 7, December 2011

The STCW Convention and its impact on our regulations

Everyone working in the marine industry has heard of the STCW Convention and its amendments: STCW95 and Manila 2010. The latter have been the topic of discussion at CSMOIM meetings for some time now as well as the national meeting of the Canadian Marine Advisory Council. In recent years, the IMO has overhauled this Convention, which was adopted by members states at the conference in Manila, Philippines on June 25, 2010.

In the coming months, I will offer you a series of regulations columns explaining the changes made by these amendments and their impact on our regulations. We encourage you to share your comments, questions and concerns so that CSMOIM can represent you properly at the next meetings with Transport Canada representatives.

In this first column of the series, I would like to outline the STCW Convention's origins, objectives and impact on our regulations.

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

In 1948, at the first conference held in Geneva, the United Nations adopted the Convention, which created the first international organization devoted solely to maritime issues, that is, the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO). The Convention came into effect in 1958 and work began the following year. Its name remained unchanged until 1982, when it became the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Today, it has 170 member states and 3 associate members.

IMO's motto summarizes its ultimate goal: "Safer shipping and cleaner oceans". To play its role, it adopted about fifty conventions, protocols, books of rules, codes and recommendations, including the SOLAS Convention, MARPOL Convention and ISPS Code.

1978 STCW Convention

Since its creation, IMO has brought enormous importance to the standards governing marine personnel, especially in terms of training. Mariners' skill is definitely the most important factor in vessel and crew safety and pollution prevention. This is why, in 1978, IMO adopted the International Convention on Standards of Training Certification and Watchkeeping (STWC Convention).

This Convention, which took effect in 1984, defines the minimum international standards applicable to mariners. Specifically, it addresses the training required for use of navigation aids, safety and rescue equipment and use of fire detection and firefighting systems.

Since its inception, the Convention has been revised twice. First, the STCW95 amendments initiated significant change, giving the IMO the power to check the management, training and certification methods applied by member parties. Then, to reflect the technical developments that now require new skills, IMO completely overhauled its Convention, introducing a great many modifications. Known as the Manila amendments, they take effect in January 2012.

As a Convention signatory, Canada must ensure that its regulations comply with the minimum requirements of the STCW and its amendments governing international certification. Canada is also subject to IMO auditing and must comply with its recommendations to maintain its recognized state ranking (white list).

Main changes

The Manila amendments and results of IMO evaluation of the Canadian STCW system will require Canada to make certain changes to our current regulations, thereby directly affecting training requirements for our navigating personnel. These changes will be explained in detail in upcoming regulations columns. To give you an overall idea of what is expected, here is a summary of the main changes to be made to the *Marine Personnel Regulations*. Canadian mariners have until January 2017 to comply with the new rules.

Renewal of certificates of competency

Every five years, holders of certificates of competency must show that they have maintained an adequate competency level, meaning, among other things, that a Marine Emergency Duties (MED) refresher course will henceforth be compulsory for all STCW-certified navigating personnel.

Navigation officers – eligible service

To be eligible, sea time for officers responsible for bridge watch must be performed on vessels with a gross registered tonnage of at least 500 tonnes.

Mechanical Engineers – eligible service

An officer responsible for an engine rating shift must acquire at least 6 months' sea time on board a vessel of at least 750 kW.

Eligibility for officer's exams

Qualified seaman or navigators who are not registered in a cadet program must complete an approved training program to be eligible for the exam leading to officer certification.

New medical standards

The new medical standards introduced include minimum visual acuity standards, hearing standards and updated physical fitness standards.