



## USCG Office of Commercial Vessel Compliance (CG-CVC) Mission Management System (MMS) Work Instruction (WI)



Category	Port State Control				
Title	Qualship 21 & E-Zero Programs				
Serial	CVC-WI-002(2)	Orig. Date	22APR24	Rev. Date	14JAN26
Disclaimer:	This guidance is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements, nor is it itself a rule. It is not intended to nor does it impose legally-binding requirements on any party. It represents the Coast Guard's current thinking on this topic and may assist industry, mariners, the public, and the Coast Guard, as well as other federal and state regulators, in applying statutory and regulatory requirements. Internet release is authorized.				
References:	(a) CVC-WI-021(series) – Targeting of Foreign Vessels for Port State Control (PSC) Examination (b) <a href="#">Application For QS21 Initial/Renewal and E-Zero Designation (Excel)</a>				
Change Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Update to Flag Administration eligibility regarding IMSAS Audit Results.</li><li>• Updates to Exit Criteria regarding DOJ/USCG criminal prosecution and special circumstances</li><li>• Updates to Conditional Renewal Eligibility</li></ul>				

- A. Purpose. This WI provides guidance regarding the Coast Guard's Qualship 21 and E-Zero programs. Wherever conflict of guidance exists related to previously released guidance, this WI shall be given precedence.
- B. Action. The Coast Guard's Port State Control (PSC) program applies to foreign-flagged vessels calling upon ports in U.S. waters. This WI provides guidance for owners, operators, and agents of vessels enrolled or considering enrollment in the Qualship 21 and E-Zero programs. Additionally, this WI provides guidance for Captains of the Port (COTP), Officers in Charge, Marine Inspections (OCMI) and Port State Control Officers (PSCO) conducting examinations onboard vessels enrolled in these programs.
- C. Background. The U.S. Coast Guard's Port State Control (PSC) program targets substandard vessels to improve maritime safety and environmental protection. To recognize and reward high-performing vessels, the Coast Guard launched the Qualship 21 (Quality Shipping for the 21st Century) program on January 1, 2001. This initiative highlights vessels, companies, and operators that demonstrate exceptional compliance with international and U.S. regulations.

In 2017, the Coast Guard introduced the E-Zero (Environmental Excellence) designation as an enhancement to Qualship 21, recognizing vessels with exemplary environmental compliance. These programs encourage operators to maintain the highest standards of safety, compliance, and environmental stewardship while promoting sustainable practices to protect the marine environment. Together, Qualship 21 and E-Zero serve as benchmarks for excellence in the maritime industry and align with international maritime goals, such as those set by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

#### D. Discussion.

1. Incentives. The Coast Guard provides incentives to high-quality vessels enrolled in Qualship 21 and E-Zero to encourage compliance and environmental stewardship. These incentives include reduced inspection frequencies, streamlined examination processes, and public recognition on platforms like the [Qualship 21 webpage](#) and Electronic Quality Shipping Information System (EQUASIS). By prioritizing high-performing vessels, the Coast Guard can allocate resources more effectively to address substandard vessels that pose greater risks.

The table below summarizes the incentives available under the Qualship 21 and E-Zero programs.

Qualship 21 and E-Zero Incentives		
Program	Vessel Type	Incentives
Qualship21	All Vessels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enrollment valid for 3 years.</li><li>• Vessel name listed on Qualship 21 webpage and EQUASIS.</li><li>• Qualship 21 certificate issued to the vessel.</li></ul>
	Tank Vessels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Certificate of Compliance (COC) annual examination scope reduced. (annual examination occurs at the mid-period of the COC's two-year validity.)</li></ul>
	Passenger Vessels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No reduction in Port State Control examination.</li><li>• Vessel receives Qualship 21 certificate and recognition on webpage/EQUASIS.</li></ul>
E-Zero	All Vessels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Special recognition denoted on the Qualship 21 certificate.</li><li>• Vessel name listed on Qualship 21 webpage and EQUASIS.</li></ul>
	Tank Vessels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Permitted to conduct cargo operations within 6 months of COC annual exam due date and COC expiration date. OCMI must verify cargo-specific statutory documents (e.g., International Oil Pollution Prevention Certificate, International Certificate of Fitness) and operational cargo systems before allowing operations. Must still receive full COC renewal examination prior to issuance of COC and vessel departure.</li></ul>

Incentives for Qualship 21 and E-Zero are subject to change at the discretion of CG-CVC to ensure the programs remain effective and responsive to evolving industry standards.

2. Eligibility Criteria. Qualship 21 is a PSC initiative designed to recognize and reward high-quality vessels that call on U.S. ports. To ensure the program remains effective and reflects industry developments, the Program Manager (CG-CVC) reserves the right to update eligibility criteria as needed.

Eligibility for Qualship 21 is calculated annually by CG-CVC-2 as part of the Coast Guard's PSC Annual Report. The list of eligible flag administrations is published in the report and becomes effective on June 30th each year. This date also marks the closure of enrollment for

vessels registered under flags that no longer meet program qualifications. Flags that qualify remain eligible to enroll vessels in Qualship 21 for a one-year period beginning on July 1st.

Vessel Eligibility Requirements		
Eligibility Criteria	Qualship 21	E-Zero
Enrollment Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must be a non U.S.-flagged vessel and registered to a <a href="#">Qualship 21 qualified flag administration</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vessel must have been enrolled in Qualship 21 for at least three consecutive years prior to applying for E-Zero, with no interruptions in service exceeding 30 days.</li> </ul>
Detentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No detentions issued by the U.S. Coast Guard in the past 36 months.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zero MARPOL-related detentions worldwide in the past three years.</li> </ul>
Marine Casualties/Violations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No serious marine incidents (46 C.F.R. § 4.03-2), and no more than one Notice of Violation (NOV) or Civil Penalty issued by the USCG in the past 36 months.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zero environmental deficiencies (e.g., MARPOL, Ballast Water, Vessel Incidental Discharge Act) in the U.S. over the past three years.</li> </ul>
Port State Control Exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A successful PSC exam conducted by the U.S. Coast Guard within the previous 24 months.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>
Ownership/Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not owned or operated by a company associated with more than one detention in U.S. waters within the past 24 months.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>
Certificates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statutory convention certificates must not be issued by a <a href="#">targeted Recognized Organization (RO)</a>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>
Right Whale Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zero NOAA/NMFS Letters of Warning, Notices of Violation (NOV), or civil penalties in the U.S. over the past five years for North Atlantic right whale speed/approach (safe</li> </ul>

		distance) or mandatory reporting violations.
Ballast Water Management System (BWMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must have an installed USCG type-approved BWMS.</li> </ul>

Once a flag administration qualifies, it retains eligibility unless its status changes based on the annual PSC data review. If a flag administration loses its qualification, **vessels already enrolled in Qualship 21 may remain in the program until their current certificates expire.** All required documentation for flag administrations and vessels must be submitted to CG-CVC-2 at [portstatecontrol@uscg.mil](mailto:portstatecontrol@uscg.mil).

The following tables outline the eligibility criteria for Flag Administrations and Vessels applying for Qualship 21 and E-Zero.

Flag Administration Eligibility Requirements	
Eligibility Criteria	Details
Detention Ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must maintain a three-year rolling detention ratio of less than 1.0%.</li> </ul>
Port State Control Exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must have at least 10 PSC exams conducted in the U.S. annually over the previous three years.</li> </ul>
IMO Member State Audit Scheme (IMSAS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must have completed a full IMSAS audit with the final audit report available for review upon request.</li> <li>• Any Corrective Action Plans (CAP) resulting from the audit must be accepted by the audit team and be available for review upon request.</li> <li>• Comments on Progress in Implementation of the CAP (CPICAP) available for review upon request.</li> </ul>

3. Application Submission. Companies wishing to enroll their vessels in the Qualship 21 or E-Zero programs must complete the application using reference (b) and submit it to [portstatecontrol@uscg.mil](mailto:portstatecontrol@uscg.mil). When applying for multiple vessels, please submit a single application that includes a list of the vessels. This approach allows for faster processing compared to submitting separate applications for each vessel. Once accepted, the vessel will receive a Qualship 21 certificate and be listed on the [Coast Guard's Qualship 21 webpage](#). Applications are processed in the order received, with a target processing time of 30 days, subject to workload.
4. Exit Criteria. Entry into Qualship 21 or E-Zero indicates that a vessel is of high quality. However, certain occurrences may result in removal of vessels from the program. A non-exhaustive list of criteria which will individually result in a vessel being removed from the Qualship 21 program includes:
  - a. Detention and determination as substandard in U.S. waters.
  - b. Coast Guard enforcement including a Civil Penalties or more than one Notice of Violation (NOV).

- c. Reportable marine casualty that meets the definition of a serious marine incident or major marine casualty per [46 C.F.R. Part 4.03-2](#) or [46 C.F.R. 4.40-5](#), respectively.
- d. Serious deficiencies (e.g., Codes 30, 60, or 17) not corrected within time limits imposed by the flag administration or RO.
- e. Vessel is found to not have reported a hazardous condition prior to arrival.
- f. Transfer to a [targeted RO](#).
- g. Change of flag administration to one not eligible for Qualship 21. List of eligible flag administrations are located [here](#).
- h. Associated with a company that is under criminal investigation or has been criminally prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice or the U.S. Coast Guard; this ineligibility applies to all vessels within the parent company, its subsidiaries, and other entities in the same fleet, and remains in effect for the duration of the investigation and for four years following the date of sentencing. If the company is required to implement an Environmental Compliance Plan (ECP) as part of sentencing, all vessels listed in the ECP will be removed from Qualship 21 for the duration of the ECP's terms or for four years after sentencing, whichever is longer.
- i. Special circumstances that, in the judgment of the Coast Guard, adversely reflect on a vessel's suitability for the program, including significant overseas casualties or detentions; pending criminal or civil investigations; or association with persons, entities, or governments subject to U.S. sanctions, embargoes, export controls, or other national security restrictions.

A company may request reconsideration from the Coast Guard if it disagrees with the adjudication of the exit criteria. A request for reconsideration may be submitted via email to [portstatecontrol@uscg.mil](mailto:portstatecontrol@uscg.mil).

- 5. Renewing Eligibility. Vessel owners are required to renew their enrollment in the Qualship 21 program upon the expiration of their Qualship 21 certificate. Renewal is not automatic and requires meeting the same conditions as initial certification, including the requirement to have completed a successful U.S. PSC safety exam within the previous 24 months.
- 6. Additional Information. For questions or concerns regarding Qualship 21 or E-Zero, contact the PSC branch at [portstatecontrol@uscg.mil](mailto:portstatecontrol@uscg.mil).

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