

Frequently Asked Questions: Polar Code

1. What is the Polar Code?

The International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code) entered into force on January 1, 2017. The Polar Code includes training requirements for deck officers engaged on ships operating in polar waters and subject to the Polar Code. Amendments to the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as amended (STCW) Convention and Code supporting the Polar Code were adopted in June, 2016, and will enter into force on July 1, 2018.

2. Why should I care about Polar Code endorsements?

These endorsements are not currently mandated by Coast Guard regulation. However, since the United States is a signatory to the STCW Convention, vessel owners and operators should be aware that their vessels are subject to foreign port state control actions including detention if mariners are not compliant with the STCW Convention and Code.

3. Where can I find out more about Polar Code endorsements?

The Coast Guard has issued CG-MMC [Policy Letter 02-18](#) “Guidelines for Qualifications of Personnel for Issuing STCW Endorsements for Basic and Advanced Polar Code Operations.” The policy letter can be found on the [NMC website](#) and contains guidance on obtaining Basic or Advanced Polar Code Operations endorsements and the application process for the endorsements.

4. Do I have to have sea service in polar waters in order to get an endorsement?

If you don't have sea service in polar waters you can qualify for the Basic Polar Code Operations endorsement by completing the training requirements.

5. How do I show proof of completion of the required training?

There are various options to document training. Refer to [Policy Letter 02-18](#), enclosures 3 and 4. Be advised there are Transitional Provisions in both enclosures that are no longer applicable for any applications received after July 1, 2020. There is also an evaluator checklist available on the [NMC website](#).

6. What are polar waters?

Polar waters are Arctic waters and/or the Antarctic area, as defined in SOLAS regulations XIV/1.2 to XIV/1.4. The U.S. Coast Guard will accept sea service letters that indicate Polar, Arctic, or Antarctic service.

7. How do I document service on polar waters?

The sea service letter on company letterhead should be documented in accordance with [46 CFR 10.232](#) and indicate sea service in polar waters while serving at the management (Master or Chief Mate) or operational (OICNW) level as appropriate.

The U.S. Coast Guard will accept sea service letters that indicate Polar, Arctic, or Antarctic service. Sea service letters, Certificates of Discharge, or other documentation that indicates service as Oceans, Near Coastal, Coastwise, Foreign, Ice Waters, etc., are not creditable as service toward these endorsements.

8. What if I work for a company that only issues Certificates of Discharge?

If your company will not issue a letter indicating service on polar waters, you can still gain the Basic Polar Code Operations endorsement through proof of completion of the training and competence requirements.

9. Can the same letter documenting training and competence be used for both Basic and Advanced Polar Code Operations?

Yes, as long as it states training and competence requirements have been met for both Basic and Advanced Polar Code Operations while serving in the appropriate position.

10. Can the sea service be obtained concurrently for both Basic and Advanced Polar Code?

Yes, the sea service submitted for Basic Polar Code may also meet the Advanced Polar Code as long as service is in the appropriate position for both. Refer to [Policy Letter 02-18](#), enclosures 3 and 4. There is also an evaluator checklist available on the [NMC website](#).

11. What is required to renew or revalidate the endorsement?

There is no regulation or policy currently in place to renew or revalidate the endorsement. Until such regulation or policy is in place, your Polar endorsement will be renewed if renewal and revalidation requirements for the required STCW endorsements (Master, Chief Mate, or OICNW) are met.