

Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW)

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STCW History

Until the advent of the STCW Convention, the focus of marine safety was on standards for vessels structures, systems, and equipment. More recently, the international maritime community began to realize that human factors play a dominant role in the prevention of marine casualties.

STCW 1978 was adopted on July 7, 1978.

As a first step to address the human factor, STCW 1978 provided a means to standardize training, certification, and watchkeeping requirements for seafarers worldwide.

1995 – First major revision

The 1995 amendments took the process an important step further. They represented a major revision of the Convention in response to a recognized need to bring the Convention up to date and to respond to critics who pointed out many vague phrases, such as “to the satisfaction of the Administration,” which resulted in different interpretations being made.

The 1995 amendments entered into force on February 1, 1997. One of the major features of the revision was the division of the technical annex into regulations, divided into chapters as before, and a new STCW Code, to which many technical regulations were transferred. Part A of the Code is mandatory, while Part B is recommended.

Another major change was the requirement for parties to the Convention to provide detailed information to IMO concerning administrative measures taken to ensure compliance with the Convention.

On February 1, 1997, the 1995 amendments entered into force.

2010 – Second major revision

In 2007, IMO started a comprehensive review of the entire STCW Convention and Code. The IMO adopted amendments from this review on June 25, 2010, in Manila, Philippines, and they entered into force on January 1, 2012. These amendments were aimed at bringing the Convention and Code up to date with developments since they were initially adopted and to enable them to address issues that were anticipated to emerge in the foreseeable future.

The critical changes include:

- Improved measures to prevent fraudulent practices associated with certificates of competency and strengthened evaluation process (monitoring of Parties' compliance with the Convention)
- Revised requirements on hours of work and rest, and new requirements for the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, as well as updated standards relating to medical fitness for seafarers
- New certification requirements for able seafarers
- New requirements relating to training in modern technology such as electronic charts and information systems (ECDIS)
- New requirements for marine environment awareness training and training in leadership and teamwork
- New training and certification requirements for electro-technical officers
- Updating of competence requirements for personnel serving on board all types of tankers, including new requirements for personnel serving on liquefied gas tankers
- New requirements for security training, as well as provisions to ensure that seafarers are properly trained to cope if their ship comes under attack by pirates
- Introduction of modern training methodology including distance learning and web-based learning
- New training guidance for personnel serving on board ships operating in polar waters
- New training guidance for personnel operating Dynamic Positioning Systems.

For more information, visit the IMO STCW webpage.

STCW Implementation in the United States

1979-1984: Department of State submitted the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978, to the Senate for advice and consent. The President signed the Convention.

1988: Completed regulatory project to revise United States (U.S.) licensing requirements to prepare for ratification of the STCW 1978 Convention.

May 1991: The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on the STCW 78.

July 1991: The Senate ratified STCW 78.

October 1991: The STCW entered into force. U.S. Coast Guard began issuing STCW certificates as endorsements to the U.S. licenses.

1993-1995: The Coast Guard held numerous public meetings around the country regarding proposed Convention Amendments.

1995: STCW was amended with an entry into force date of February 1, 1997. The amended Convention expanded details for training, certification, and watchkeeping.

1996: The Coast Guard published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM).

1997: The Coast Guard published an Interim Final Rule (IR) on June 26, 1997, titled Implementation of the 1995 Amendments to STCW, which outlined changes to the regulations governing the credentialing of merchant mariners. Four Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circulars were also published. The purpose of the IR was to ensure that U.S. merchant mariner credentials would meet International Maritime Organization standards, thereby reducing the possibility of U.S. vessel detention in a foreign port for non-compliance with the STCW Convention.

February 1997: Vessel Familiarization and Basic Safety Training for all seafarers with designated safety or pollution prevention duties became effective.

2009: The Coast Guard published a Supplemental Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (SNPRM) on November 17, 2009, which updated the changes to the IR from 1997 and incorporated all of the 1995 amendments to the STCW Convention and Code.

2009: In response to comments received from the public and the Merchant Marine Personnel Advisory Committee regarding the SNPRM, the Coast Guard issued a notice in the Federal Register that a different regulatory approach was being considered to implement the STCW amendments into U.S. regulations.

2011: On August 1, 2011, the Coast Guard published a revised SNPRM, which proposed implementation of all STCW amendments, including the 2010 Manila amendments, as well as changes to domestic endorsements.

2013: On December 24, 2013, the Coast Guard published a Final Rule (FR) titled, “Implementation of the Amendments to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978 (STCW), as Amended, and Changes to National Endorsements” (78 FR 77796). This FR incorporated the 2010 Amendments to the STCW Convention into the U.S. regulations and also makes other necessary changes to national regulations for the purposes of reorganization, clarification, and needed updates.

2014: On September 29, 2014, the Coast Guard published a FR that made non-substantive changes throughout Title 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The purpose of this rule was to make conforming amendments and technical corrections to Coast Guard regulations.

2017: January 1, 2017, the 2010 Amendments to the STCW Convention became fully effective. Transitioning provisions for certain endorsements remain delineated in NVICs.

2019: March 24, 2019, all national transitional provisions became fully effective, all transitional provisions expired.

STCW Structure

The following is an overview of the chapters contained in STCW, and regulations associated with it. Convention: The STCW Convention contains basic requirements that are expanded on and explained in the Code. The current revision of STCW Convention, which includes the 2010 Manila amendments, is composed of 17 Articles and 18 Resolutions, specifically Resolutions 1 and 3 through 19.

Code – Part A: Mandatory standards regarding provisions of the annex to the STCW Convention Part A of the Code, which includes Resolution 2, is mandatory. This part provides the minimum standards of competence required for seagoing personnel. Details are included in a series of tables. This part of the Code is divided into chapters, and the chapters are divided into regulations as detailed below.

Code – Part B: Recommended guidance regarding provisions of the STCW Convention and its annex

Part B of the Code contains recommended guidance, and is intended to clarify and help implement the Convention. It is structured similarly to Part A and, for ease of use, the numbering corresponds to the numbering in Part A.

Chapter I: General Provisions

Regulation I/1 – Definitions and clarifications

Regulation I/2 – Certificates and endorsements

Regulation I/3 – Principles governing near-coastal voyages

Regulation I/4 – Control procedures

Regulation I/5 – National provisions

Regulation I/6 – Training and assessment

Regulation I/7 – Communication of information

Regulation I/8 – Quality standards

Regulation I/9 – Medical standards

Regulation I/10 – Recognition of certificates

Regulation I/11 – Revalidation of certificates

Regulation I/12 – Use of simulators

Regulation I/13 - Conduct of trials

Regulation I/14 - Responsibilities of companies

Regulation I/15 – Transitional provisions

Chapter II: Master and deck department

Regulation II/1 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of officers in charge of a navigational watch on ships of 500 gross tonnage or more

Regulation II/2 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of masters and chief mates on ships of 500 gross tonnage or more

Regulation II/3 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of officers in charge of a navigational watch and for masters on ships of less than 500 gross tonnage engaged on near-coastal voyages

Regulation II/4 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of ratings forming part of a navigational watch

Regulation II/5 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of ratings as able seafarer deck

Chapter III: Engine department

Regulation III/1 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of officers in charge of an engineering watch in a manned engine-room or as designated duty engineers in a periodically unmanned engine-room

Regulation III/2 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of chief engineer officers and second engineer officers on ships powered by main propulsion machinery of 3000 kW propulsion power or more

Regulation III/3 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of chief engineer officers and second engineer officers on ships powered by main propulsion machinery of between 750 kW and 3000 kW propulsion power

Regulation III/4 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of ratings forming part of a watch in a manned engine-room or designated to perform duties in a periodically unmanned engine-room

Regulation III/5 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of ratings as able seafarer engine in a manned engine-room or designated to perform duties in a periodically unmanned engine-room

Regulation III/6 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of electro-technical officers

Regulation III/7 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of electro-technical rating

Chapter IV: Radio communication and radio operators

Regulation IV/1 – Application

Regulation IV/2 – Mandatory minimum requirements for certification of GMDSS radio operators

Chapter V: Special training requirements for personnel on certain types of ships

Regulation V/1-1 – Mandatory minimum requirements for the training and qualifications of masters, officers, and ratings on oil and chemical tankers

Regulation V/1-2 – Mandatory minimum requirements for the training and qualifications of masters, officers, and ratings on liquefied gas tankers

Regulation V/2 – Mandatory minimum requirements for the training and qualifications of masters, officers, and ratings and other personnel on passenger ships

Chapter VI: Emergency, occupational safety, medical care, and survival functions

Regulation VI/1 – Mandatory minimum requirements for safety familiarization, basic training, and instruction for all seafarers

Regulation VI/2 – Mandatory minimum requirements for the issue of certificates of proficiency in survival craft, rescue boats, and fast rescue boats

Regulation VI/3 – Mandatory minimum training in advanced firefighting

Regulation VI/4 – Mandatory minimum requirements related to medical first aid and medical care

Regulation VI/5 – Mandatory minimum requirements for the issue of certificates of proficiency for ship security officers

Regulation VI/6 – Mandatory minimum requirements for security-related training and instruction for all seafarers

Chapter VII: Alternative certification

Regulation VII/1 – Issue of alternative certificates

Regulation VII/2 – Certification of seafarers

Regulation VII/3 – Principles governing the issue of alternative certificates

Chapter VIII: Watchkeeping

Regulation VIII/1 – Fitness for duty

Regulation VIII/2 – Watchkeeping arrangements and principles to be observed