



Maritime &
Coastguard
Agency

MARINE INFORMATION NOTE

MIN 688 (M) Amendment 4 Code of safe working practices for merchant seafarers: (COSWP) 2026 Edition

Notice to all shipowners, ship operators, managers, masters and seafarers.

This notice replaces MIN 688 (M) Amendment 3.

This MIN expires 31st March 2027.

Summary

This notice provides details of the 2026 amendments to the code of safe working practices for merchant seafarers (“the Code”, also “COSWP”).

The code covers the regulatory framework and provides best practice guidance for health and safety on board ship. It also gives guidance on safety management and identifies statutory duties underlying the advice and includes practical information for safe working on board.

1. Introduction

1.1 The new edition of the code of safe working practices for merchant seafarers (“the code”) was issued on 16th March 2026 after consultation with industry.

1.2 The code is an authoritative best practice manual on health and safety on board ships and is endorsed by the National Maritime Occupational Health and Safety Committee (NMOHSC). It deals with the regulatory framework for health and safety on board ship, safety management and statutory duties underlying the advice and gives practical information on safe working.

2. Amendments

2.1 In 2024 following stakeholder engagement and review by the COSWP Working Group, which consists of representatives of the shipping industry, seafarers and seafarers’ unions in collaboration with MCA policy leads, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency redesigned and modernised the Code to improve its structure, ensure consistency and simplify its language. The use of recurring design features enables quicker reference and aids understanding, making it clearer and easier to follow. A glossary was also added.

2.2 In addition, there was a change in the physical format of the document from loose-leaf to bound. Inserting a yearly amendment to replace outdated content took an average of one hour of administrative time per update, per code. Over the years and for the many copies held within some companies, this is a significant cost. In addition, having the latest and best guidance relies on ensuring all amendments are updated annually. This has improved the end-user experience, removed the yearly manual updating process and made it easier for shipowners to ensure they are using the latest copy of the Code.

2.3 The following table summarises the changes that have occurred for the 2026 edition of the Code, following stakeholder engagement and review by the COSWP Working Group, which consists of representatives of the shipping industry, seafarers and seafarers' unions in collaboration with MCA policy leads.

2.4 In addition, in various chapters references have been updated and typographical corrections made (not detailed below).

3. Table of Amendments 2026

3.1 Sections 17 & 18 International Management Code for the Safe Operation of Ships and for Pollution Prevention (International Safety Management (ISM) Code)

2026 Amendment Paragraph Number (new reference if altered)
17
18
19

3.1.1 Reason for section 17 & 18 amendments; comments from stakeholder engagement exercise proposing to re-word sections and include changes from the International Safety Management Code.

3.2 Chapter 4 Emergency drills and procedures

2026 Amendment Paragraph Number (new reference if altered)
4.8 Drills for enclosed spaces, 8.4.4, 4.8.5
4.9 What to do in an enclosed space emergency, 4.9.3

3.2.1 Reason for chapter 4 2026 amendment; following an MAIB report, a recommendation was made to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to review and revise the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers to ensure that emergency drill scenarios for enclosed space rescues include the possible presence of shoreside staff or third parties.

3.3 Chapter 15 Entering enclosed spaces

2026 Amendment Paragraph Number (new reference if altered)
15.1.3 Key points, 15.1.13, 15.13.5

3.3.1 Reason for chapter 15 amendment: Following an MAIB report, a recommendation was made to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to review and revise the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers to ensure that emergency drill scenarios for enclosed space rescues include the possible presence of shoreside staff or third parties.

3.4 Chapter 19 Lifting equipment and operations

2026 Amendment Paragraph Number (new reference if altered)
19.2 Regular maintenance, 19.2.1, 19.2.2, 19.2.3, 19.2.4, 19.2.5
19.3 Thorough examination and inspection, 19.3.1, 19.3.2

3.4.1 Reason for chapter 19 amendment: Comments from the stakeholder engagement exercise suggesting the rewording of this chapter to avoid confusion amongst vessel operators and ship staff. It was also agreed that a reference be added to this chapter.

4. GOV.UK digital version

4.1 A version of the code is available on gov.uk for information purposes. This version complies with central government policy on accessibility. The document includes the text and images from the COSWP 2026 edition.

4.2 It does not match the published version and is intended for online reference only; it is not suitable for onboard use and inspection.

4.3 The fully designed published version is available to purchase from tsoshop.co.uk

5. COSWP review 2027

5.1 COSWP has developed since its publication in 2015 to become an internationally recognised maritime industry standard of best practice. Therefore, we will continue to review the code, with support from stakeholders, to ensure content remains relevant and updated. Any comments, queries or suggestions should be directed to seafarersafety@mcga.gov.uk

More information

Seafarer Safety and Health Branch
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Bay 2/7
Spring Place
105 Commercial Road
Southampton
SO15 1EG

Telephone: +44 (0)203 81 72250

Email: seafarersafety@mcga.gov.uk

Website: www.gov.uk/mca

Please note that all addresses and telephone numbers are correct at time of publishing.