



Maritime &
Coastguard
Agency

MERCHANT SHIPPING NOTICE

MSN 1869(M) Amendment 2 Safety Management Code for Domestic Passenger Ships

Notice to all Shipowners, Operators, Charterers and Managers; Masters, Officers and Seamen

This notice should be read with MGN 536 (M) Amendment 6 and replaces MSN 1869(M) Amendment 1

Summary

This notice sets out the instructions regarding the safety management of domestic passenger ships.

Key points: The Safety Management Code for Domestic Passenger Ships is based on general principles and objectives and is expressed in terms that can be applied to a wide variety of passenger ships.

Operators are to develop and implement the following safe practices:

- a health, safety and environmental protection policy;
- procedures to ensure the safe operation of ships in compliance with relevant rules;
- lines of communication between personnel, ashore and afloat;
- procedures for reporting accidents; and
- procedures for responding to emergency situations.

The Merchant Shipping (Domestic Passenger Ships) (Safety Management Code) Regulations 2027 consolidate safety management requirements that were previously spread across different legislation. This included the Merchant Shipping (Passenger Ships) (Safety Code for UK Categorised Waters) Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010/680) and their associated Merchant Shipping Notices — MSN 1823 and MSN 1823 (Edition 2), as well as the preceding version of the Safety Management Code for Domestic Passenger Ships in MSN

1869(M) Amendment 1. These requirements also extend to ships choosing to comply with the Small Seagoing Passenger Ship Code, which is a non-statutory alternative construction standard. With this consolidation, all domestic passenger ship safety management requirements have been brought together under the Merchant Shipping (Domestic Passenger Ships) (Safety Management Code) Regulations 2027 and a single, updated Merchant Shipping Notice: MSN 1869(M) Amendment 2.

1. Introduction/background

1.1 The Merchant Shipping (Domestic Passenger Ships) (Safety Management Code) Regulations 2027 (“the Regulations”) came into force on XXXXXX. The Regulations give effect to the Safety Management Code for Domestic Passenger Ships (“the Code”) and apply to all domestic passenger ships except those ships operated by domestic operators which comply with the International Safety Management (ISM) Code.

1.2 The purpose of a safety management code is to establish a common standard for the safe operation of passenger ships employed in the domestic trade.

1.3 It is recognised that there are a wide variety of passenger ships in the domestic trade. The Code is intended to be concise and straightforward so that it can be applied to a wide variety of ships and developed by each operator to meet its specific needs.

1.4 To comply with the Code, each operator should create a safe working environment.

1.5 The term “operator” is defined in the Regulations to mean, in relation to a ship, (a) a person, who is not the owner of the ship, who has assumed responsibility for the operation of that ship from the owner and has agreed with the owner to take over all the duties and responsibilities imposed by the DSM Code; or (b) in all other cases, the owner of that ship.

1.6 This Notice describes the objectives of developing a safety management system (“SMS”) and how to implement it effectively. The substantive elements of the Code are detailed in sections 3 – 13.

1.7 Where due to the nature of the operation(s) and / or complexity of a ship the MCA determines there is a greater risk to safety, the MCA may require the operator to develop a more complex and robust SMS.

2. Objectives

2.1 The objectives of safety management are to ensure a simple and cost-effective means of:

- ensuring safety on board;
- preventing human injury and loss of life;
- preventing pollution; and
- complying with applicable rules and regulations, and taking into account relevant guidance.

2.2 Each operator should develop and implement safe practices through a safety management system which includes the following:

- procedures to ensure the safe operation of ships in compliance with relevant regulations, taking into account relevant guidelines and best practice;
- lines of communication between personnel, ashore and on board, with regard to additional requirements and local by-laws;
- procedures to prevent pollution;
- procedures for reporting accidents; and
- procedures for responding to emergency situations.

2.3 To comply with the Code, each operator should create a safe working environment in accordance with the matters described in sections 3 – 13.

3. A Health, Safety and Environmental Protection Policy

3.1 The operator must have a policy that addresses health, safety and environmental protection matters relating to the passenger ship operations for which the operator is responsible, both ashore and afloat. Further guidance on the content of this policy is provided in MGN 536(M) Amendment 6.

3.2 Under the Health, Safety and Environmental Policy, all personnel, both ashore and on board, have a duty to take care of themselves and others who may be affected by their acts or omissions.

3.3 The operator should develop a policy on the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse.

3.4 Under section 131 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, it is an offence for a ship in United Kingdom national waters, navigable by sea-going ships but which do not form part of the sea, to discharge any oil or oily mixture into those waters. It is recommended that the operator of such ships develops and implements an oil management plan to the same standard as the garbage management plan¹ and to integrate it with the operator's Health and Safety Protection Policy.

3.5 In waters not subject section 131 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, the requirements for pollution prevention implemented by the Local Authority or Navigation Authority should be complied with.

3.6 The Merchant Shipping and Fishing Vessels (Health and Safety at Work) Regulations 1997 (S.I. 1997/2962) specifically require² the appointment of one or more competent persons to take responsibility for health and safety. The competent person(s) should be identified in the SMS. It is the responsibility of the operator to ensure that the policy is complied with and that the responsibilities are understood.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Regulation 8 of the Regulations provides that the master must operate a ship in accordance with the safety management system on the basis of which the Domestic Safety Management Certificate (or an equivalent document) was issued.

¹ This is required by regulation 11 of the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships) Regulations 2020 (S.I. 2020/621).

² See regulation 15.

4.2 The master's responsibility should be defined and documented to ensure there is no scope for any misunderstanding. The master has the overriding authority to make any decision regarding the safety of the ship and the persons on board. To ensure that there is no ambiguity regarding the authority of the master, there must be a simple written statement to this effect. Assistance from the operator should be available ashore at all times.

4.3 Each employee's responsibility and their authority should be clear. This may be best illustrated in a chart or diagram which shows clearly who reports to whom.

5. Designated Person

5.1 Regulation 9 of the Regulations provides that an operator must, in relation to each ship owned by it or for which it has operational responsibility, has two specific duties. These duties are to:

5.1.1 designate a person who is to discharge the responsibility described in section 5.2, and

5.1.2 ensure that the designated person is provided with sufficient authority and resources, as well as appropriate knowledge and sufficient experience of the operation of ships, to enable that person to discharge the responsibility described in paragraph 5.2.

5.2 The Designated Person must:

- monitor the safe and efficient operation of that ship with particular regard to safety and pollution prevention aspects;
 - take such steps as are necessary to ensure compliance with the safety management system; and
- ensure that proper provision is made for the ship to be so manned, equipped and maintained that it is fit to operate in accordance with that safety management system.

5.3 To assist the operator in meeting its responsibilities described in paragraph 5.1.1 and 5.1.2, the designated person should have access to the highest level of management.

6. Personnel and Training

6.1 All personnel should be qualified as required by regulations and receive training appropriate to the tasks they undertake. The operator is responsible for ensuring that this training is given and that the personnel understand the relevant rules and regulations.

6.2 As a minimum, this means:

- for the master, the relevant qualifications;
- for personnel other than the master, training appropriate to their designated duties.

6.3 Before personnel (whether as employees or others) commence work on the ship, they must receive appropriate familiarisation training and proper instruction in on-board procedures. This could include but not necessarily be limited to:

- mooring and unmooring;
- emergency alarms and mustering of passengers;

- launching and recovery of survival craft;
- evacuation from all areas of the ship;
- donning of lifejackets; and
- use and handling of fire-fighting equipment.

6.4 Where the ship uses locks or sluice gates, on-the-job training must be provided in respect of these processes.

6.5 Relevant training should also be provided to casual staff – i.e. not regular “crew” – who may be needed to assist in controlling or guiding passengers in the event of an evacuation.

7. Procedures to Ensure Safe Operation of Ships in Compliance with the Rules and Regulations

7.1 Domestic passenger ships are subject to a range of statutory requirements. While all such ships are passenger ships, the specific rules and regulations that apply may vary depending on factors such as the area in which the ship operates, its age, or how and when it was constructed or certified. Operators must ensure they identify and comply with all statutory requirements relevant to any ship they operate.

7.2 The operator should draw up simple procedures to ensure that safe working practices are carried out on the ship. These may be in the form of checklists that all personnel can follow.

8. Onboard Procedures

8.1 Simple procedures should be developed for the operation of the ship. These should include, but not be limited to, procedures relating to:

- testing of equipment, including steering gear, prior to commencing a passage;
- navigation and handling of the ship;
- maintenance routines;
- bunkering operations;
- mooring and unmooring;
- passenger counting and crowd control;
- watertight integrity;
- stability of the ship; and
- conduct of passengers and crew while on board.

8.2 For some ships, it will be appropriate to have permanently exhibited checklists, e.g. in the wheelhouse for navigational items. Alternatively, in smaller ships, the record could take any suitable form, such as a diary as distinct from a specially printed logbook. Whatever form the record takes, such entries should be accepted as evidence of compliance with the requirements of the on-board procedures.

9. Procedures for Reporting Accidents

9.1 The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2026 (S.I. 2026/0430) make it a legal requirement for the operator and master to report all accidents.

The master and/or the operator must inform the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) of all reportable accidents in accordance with the 2026 Regulations.

9.2 All accidents and near misses, including pollution incidents, must be recorded and reported to the operator, who must take corrective action with the aim of improving safety. Any incident or defect affecting the safety of the ship, passengers or crew is to be reported to the MCA at the earliest opportunity.

9.3 The requirement for reporting accidents should be well understood by all personnel to improve the safety culture practised on board. The operator must, therefore, have a procedure in place to ensure the MAIB and MCA are informed of any reportable accident.

9.4 It is essential that, in the event of an emergency, there is the ability to communicate with the emergency services either directly or via a shore base. The shore base may be the operator office, the local Coastguard, Police or Fire Station, or another office as may be agreed between the ship and the shore base.

10. Procedures for Responding to Emergency Situations

10.1 There should be clearly stated procedures for responding to emergency situations.

10.2 These may include, but not be limited to:

- collision;
- fire;
- abandoning ship;
- flooding or grounding;
- loss of steering gear;
- medical emergency;
- man overboard;
- providing assistance to other ships;
- pollution;
- enclosed space rescue;
- security incidents and violent acts;
- main propulsion failure, etc.

10.3 Checklists may be useful in this regard.

11. Preparation for Emergencies

11.1 The potential emergencies likely to have been encountered by the ship should be considered. Exercises should be carried out in responding to these emergencies and arranging evacuation from the ship.

11.2 Where possible, all personnel should be involved in these exercises, both ashore and afloat. All personnel involved must have regard to MSN 1878 (arrangements for the carriage of agreed search and rescue co-operation plans aboard UK passenger vessels)³.

³ [MSN 1878 Arrangements for the carriage of agreed search and rescue co-operation plans aboard UK passenger vessels](#).

11.3 The roles and responsibilities of all personnel in an emergency situation should be developed in accordance with the principles of the Code.

11.4 The exercises should be recorded. The names of those who participated should also be recorded.

12. Equipment

12.1 Maintenance of the ship and equipment is an essential component of safety management. The equipment should be checked and tested daily when in use, in addition to the tests referred to in the onboard procedures section of the Code (which are prepared in accordance with section 8).

12.2 There should be procedures for a more detailed inspection and maintenance programme of the ship and equipment.

12.3 The operator should determine the frequency of the inspections, and every inspection should be recorded.

12.4 It is recommended that a checklist is prepared as an aide memoire for inspecting equipment.

13. Review

13.1 The operator should review the safety management system of all ships at least once every three years.

14. Certification

14.1 Document of Compliance.

14.1.1 Regulations 10 and 11 of the Regulations make provision for the audit of operators and the issue of the Document of Compliance ("the DOC").

14.1.2 The MCA will issue the DOC to the operator after carrying out an initial or renewal audit of the operator. This audit ensures that the operator complies with the requirements of the Code and has demonstrated its ability to implement and maintain an effective safety management system.

14.1.3 Regulation 14 of the Regulations makes provision about the duration and validity of the DOC. The DOC is valid for a period not exceeding five years, subject to the satisfactory completion of the relevant initial or renewal audit conducted by the MCA and certain other matters which are specified in Regulation 14.

14.1.4 Regulation 17(1) of the Regulations requires the operator to submit an annual self-assessment to the MCA. Its purpose is to ensure compliance in the periods between the relevant audits. An annual self-assessment may be conducted by the operator, or by a person who is independent from the operator and who has sufficient knowledge of passenger vessel operations and safety management. The annual self-assessment must follow an agreed-upon format, which must be incorporated into the safety management system.

14.1.5 For practical reasons, in a case where an operator is responsible for the operation of one ship, a single self-assessment may be accepted which covers both the operator and ship.

14.1.6 Operators which are responsible for operating more than one ship are required to submit an operator self-assessment and one self-assessment per ship.

14.1.7 If findings are identified during any audit, including those arising from the review of an annual self-assessment, the MCA will follow prescribed audit procedures (regulation 10(3) of the Regulations specifies the circumstances in which an additional audit in respect of the DOC may be carried out) and, if necessary, take enforcement action (regulation 15 of the Regulations makes provision for the cancellation or suspension of the DOC).

14.1.8 The validity of the DOC is fundamental to the operation of ships under the operator's management. If the DOC is suspended or cancelled, in accordance with regulation 15(2) of the Regulations the MCA will suspend or cancel the Domestic Safety Management Certificate (DSMC) for every ship in respect of which the DOC was issued. All such ships must not operate until the DOC is reinstated (if it was suspended) or reissued (if it was cancelled) and the DSMCs are reinstated or reissued (as the case may be).

14.2 Domestic Safety Management Certificate

14.2.1 Regulations 12 and 13 of the Regulations make provision for the audit of ships and the issue of the Domestic Safety Management Certificate ("the DSMC"). The DSMC may only be issued or endorsed in relation to a ship if the operator of that ship has been issued a DOC and an audit confirms that the ship is operating in compliance with its safety management system.

14.2.2 Regulation 14 of the Regulations makes provision about the duration and validity of the DSMC. The DSMC is valid for a period not exceeding five years, subject to the satisfactory completion of the relevant initial or mid-term audit conducted by the MCA and certain other matters which are specified in Regulation 14.

14.2.3 When a ship is new or when an operator assumes responsibility for a ship which is new to that operator, following the initial audit a short term DSMC should be issued for a period not exceeding three months. This should be followed by an additional audit in accordance with 15.2.1 and subsequent full-term certification following a successful additional audit.

14.2.4 The onboard audits will be conducted when the ship is operational in all aspects and will be carried out at a time which is mutually convenient to the operator and person carrying out the audit. The ship may need to be taken out of service for the duration of the audit, including the drill. Some elements, such as passenger boarding arrangements, mooring, and navigation, may be subject to audit in service.

The mid-term audit may be conducted at the same time as the passenger certificate renewal survey⁴. However, if it is carried out separately from the passenger certificate renewal survey, the full scope of the audit, including a crew drill, must be completed.

⁴ The passenger certificate renewal survey is carried out in accordance with the relevant regulations which apply to the ship e.g. the Merchant Shipping (Passenger Ships) (Safety Code for UK Categorised Waters) Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010/680).

14.3 If an onboard audit is not requested within the required timeframe, the MCA may suspend or cancel the DSMC. The ship must cease operations until the audit is carried out, and the certificate is reinstated or reissued (as the case may be).

14.3.1 The operator will carry out an annual self-assessment to ensure compliance with the safety management system for the operator and each ship. The annual self-assessment must be submitted to the MCA for review. An annual self-assessment may be conducted either by the operator or by an independent person with suitable knowledge and experience of passenger operations. The annual self-assessment must follow an agreed format, which will be incorporated into the safety management system.

14.3.2 If the ship is operating without a valid DSMC, the MCA may suspend or cancel its Passenger certificate. The ship must not operate until the required audits are completed and the relevant certificate is reinstated or reissued (as the case may be).

14.3.3 If findings are identified during any audit, including those arising from the review of an annual self-assessment, the MCA will follow prescribed audit procedures (regulation 12(3) of the Regulations specifies the circumstances in which an additional audit in respect of the DSMC may be carried out) and, if necessary, take enforcement action (regulation 15 of the Regulations makes provision for the cancellation or suspension of the DSMC).

15. Additional Audits

15.1 Regulations 10(3) and 12(3) make provision for additional audits in respect of the DOC and the DSMC, respectively. In accordance with those provisions, the MCA may conduct additional audits of an operator or vessel (as the case may be) if any of the following apply:

15.1.1 If an operator fails to submit an annual self-assessment in accordance with regulation 17(1) (Duties of operators and masters in relation to certificates etc).

15.1.2 Where an operator submits an annual self-assessment, a surveyor determines that the operator is not complying with the requirements of the DSM Code as implemented through the operator's SMS.

15.1.3 If a surveyor identifies a major non-conformity, not later than a period of three months after that date;

15.1.4 There have been serious or numerous incidents involving one or more of the operator's ships.

15.2 In addition to the circumstances listed in 15.1, the MCA may conduct additional DSMC audits:

15.2.1 Regulation 12(3)(b) of the Regulations makes provision in relation to a case in which a ship is new or in which an operator assumes responsibility for a ship which is new to the operator. In such cases, a short-term DSMC which is valid for a period not exceeding three months will be initially issued, followed by an additional audit within three months for the purposes of the issue of a full-term certificate.

16. Fees

16.1 Operators will be charged at the main hourly rate set for the audits performed by the MCA.

17. Exemptions

17.1 Exemptions to these arrangements will be considered case by case. In accordance with Recommendation 27.40 of Lord Justice Clarke's Inquiry, exemptions from the provisions of the Code will be granted only on condition that an equivalent level of safety is achieved.

18. Forms Of Certificates

Templates for the DOC and the DSMC are provided in Annex 1. These templates should be used when issuing certificates under the DSM regime. Certificates are to be issued in accordance with the requirements of the applicable regulations and this guidance.

More information

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