

Recommendations for operation in polar waters for vessels not carrying a Polar Ship Certificate

The Norwegian Maritime Authority encourages more focus on safety and environment for crew and vessels operating in polar waters by presenting recommendations for fishing vessels and other vessels not required to carry a Polar Ship Certificate, for instance small vessels carrying twelve passengers or less, smaller cargo ships and passenger ships in Svalbard that are required to comply with the Polar Code, but do not carry a Polar Ship Certificate.

Operation in polar waters is demanding due to unpredictable weather and ice conditions. Vessels operating in these waters must take the necessary precautions and plan the trip well.

Matters to be considered by the company and crew before departure

The safety management system is a tool used by the company and the vessel to plan and execute operations in order to minimise the risks.

All routines operations must be described in the safety management system, risk assessments must be carried out and emergency preparedness plans must be developed. Even though a Polar Ship Certificate is not required, a large part of the content of the Polar Code will serve as guidelines in the development of procedures and emergency preparedness plans before operating in polar waters.

Is the vessel fit to operate in these waters?

An assessment must be made of the vessel. In which waters is the vessel certified to operate? What is the vessel designed to withstand? Has it been maintained to withstand the stresses it is built for and could be exposed to?



Environment

The Polar Code consists of two parts, one related to safety and the other related to environment. Part II is related to the environment and adds additional requirements to each MARPOL Annex. This means that when an Annex to MARPOL applies to a given ship, the corresponding provisions of the Polar Code is also applicable. A ship which is not subject to the safety part of the Polar Code may still be subject to the environmental part. The environmental part includes several operational requirements that the company and crew must be aware of.

Is the crew competent and familiar with the procedures and risks identified in the risk assessments?

Vessels that are subject to the Polar Code are required to provide additional training and certification for the officers on board. See sections 58 (a) and (b) of the Regulations on qualifications and certificates for seafarers. This requirement does not apply to all vessel types (e.g. fishing vessels). However, the companies are required to ensure satisfactory training regardless of vessel type. In accordance with the Regulations on working environment, health and safety on board ship, all persons working on board shall receive the necessary training to be able to carry out their work in a safe and proper manner.

The conditions in polar waters require a higher standard of competence, particularly in the use of navigational and radio equipment, as this equipment may be affected at high latitudes. Moreover, there may be areas with no mobile coverage and VHF coverage. Risk assessments must include an assessment of the possibility of receiving help in the event of an unforeseen situation.

When planning to send a vessel to operate in polar waters, the company should consider the distance to search and rescue services, port of refuge, towing help or other vessels that may assist in an emergency.

Do the crew members have access to the latest information on weather, currents, sea and ice conditions?

Radio communication in polar areas can be challenging due to the great variations in radio coverage. This means that it can be difficult to obtain up-to-date information, which is a fact that stresses the importance of planning the trip well in advance. IMO has prepared a guidance for navigation and communication equipment intended for use on ships operating in polar waters (MSC.1/Circ. 1612). It can be useful to read this document thoroughly.

The established ice-charts may not necessarily be up-to-date, and they are not high-resolution charts. They only provide a picture of the current situation, not a forecast. Ice conditions may quickly change and are difficult to predict. It is important for the crew members to know how they get access to this type of information and to be aware of its quality.

Are the maps of good enough quality? Should special precautions be taken with regard to old surveys?

Many nautical charts for the coast of Svalbard are based on old surveys. Not only could the sounding figures be wrong. The depth sounding position may also be wrong. Many areas also remain unsurveyed, particularly areas where glaciers have retreated.

Is the equipment on board suited for work in polar waters?

The crew must be provided with proper workwear. Antennas and similar equipment on board may cease to function if covered by ice. The crew's work clothes and marine equipment must be assessed and reviewed with regard to the conditions that could and will arise.

In the event of an evacuation of the vessel, immersion suits, lifejackets, liferafts, etc. must be capable of withstanding extreme weather conditions. The IMO has developed guidelines on life-saving appliances and arrangements for ships operating in polar waters (MSC.1/Circ. 1614). These guidelines are originally established for cargo ships and passenger ships required to have a Polar Ship Certificate, but are just as relevant for fishing vessels and other vessels operating in polar waters.

Maintenance

It can be difficult to obtain spare parts at short notice. Some components will be worn faster than others and should therefore be replaced more often. It should thus be considered whether there is a need to replace parts earlier than planned, or to bring on board more spare parts than normal.

Timely planning is required to ensure safe operation or voyage. The considerations mentioned above must be respected. We would strongly recommend that fishing vessels and other vessels without a Polar Ship Certificate that are sailing in polar waters use the safety measures described in the Polar Code.

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This document has been electronically approved, and therefore does not contain handwritten signatures.

Relevant legislation and links:

Legislation

Regulations on watchkeeping for the deck and engine department on Norwegian fishing vessels - <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/1987-06-30-580>

THE POLAR CODE part I (safety) -

<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/polar/Documents/POLAR%20CODE%20TEXT%20AS%20AD%20OPTED.pdf>

THE POLAR CODE part II (environment) -

<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/polar/Documents/POLAR%20CODE%20TEXT%20AS%20AD%20OPTED.pdf>

Regulations on qualifications and certificates for seafarers –

<https://www.sdir.no/contentassets/5c5a7acf1c15476f97762dd254d9a12a/22-december-2011-no.-1523-qualifications-and-certificates-for-seafarers.pdf?t=1594902368957>

Regulations on the working environment, health and safety of persons working on board ship - <https://www.sdir.no/contentassets/48af0601af924396b8751ce980b86439/1-january-2005-no.-8-working-environment-health-and-safety-of-persons-working-on-board-ship.pdf?t=1573809008991>

IMO GUIDELINES

MSC.1/Circ. 1614) INTERIM GUIDELINES ON LIFE-SAVING APPLIANCES AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR SHIPS OPERATING IN POLAR WATERS - <https://www.register-iri.com/wp-content/uploads/MSC.1-Circ.1614.pdf>

(MSC.1/Circ. 1612) GUIDANCE FOR NAVIGATION AND COMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT INTENDED FOR USE ON SHIPS OPERATING IN POLAR WATERS - <https://www.register-iri.com/wp-content/uploads/MSC.1-Circ.1612.pdf>

Weather reports, etc.

BarentsWatch: <https://www.barentswatch.no/en/services/>

ArcticInfo: <https://www.barentswatch.no/arcticinfo/settings/>

<https://www.yr.no/?spr=eng>

<https://www.met.no/en/Sea-and-High-North-areas>

<http://ocean.dmi.dk/polarview/ugekort.php>

Norwegian Maritime Authority

<https://www.sdir.no/sjofart/fartoy/miljo/polar-skipsfart/>

<https://www.sdir.no/en/shipping/vessels/vessel-types/>

<https://www.sdir.no/sjofart/fartoy/fartostyper/fiskefartoy/fiskefartoy-over-15-meter/fiskefartoy-i-polare-farvann/>

Other

Norwegian rescue services: <https://www.hovedredningsentralen.no/english/>

Police / Governor of Svalbard: <https://www.sysselmannen.no/en/>

Arctic Shipping Best Practice Information Forum: [https://pame.is/arcticshippingforum - part-ia-safety-measures](https://pame.is/arcticshippingforum-part-ia-safety-measures)