

Training lags a year behind the code

Thanks to IMO's meeting schedules, the Polar Code's training goals will take effect a year late. President of The Nautical Institute, David (Duke) Snider, explains what this will mean

It will be a year after the Polar Code comes into force before the sections that address crew training and certification requirements become effective. They are addressed in Part I-A Safety of the code's Chapter 12 and outline requirements for deck officers and masters on board Polar Code applicable vessels that will operate in polar waters. Their delayed entry into force is because of the fixed schedule of IMO committee meetings related to STCW amendments.

That timetable would not permit acceptance of these details until IMO's Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) held its 97th meeting in November 2016. This has delayed any entry into force of the sections relating to crew training and experience that must have STCW amendments to be enabled until well after the code's entry-into-force date.

As a result, these sections will not come into force until 1 January 2018. All other provisions enabled by Marpol and Solas were completed to fit the 2017 timeline, and the bulk of the Polar Code comes into force 1 January 2017, with an accompanying phase-in period for existing ships.

When the STCW amendments do come into force, deck officers and

masters may be required to complete training and receive certification at either a basic or advanced level. As set out in the table below, the requirement to have these 'Polar Waters Training' courses and certificates will depend on the vessel, the ice conditions and the individual officer's position on board the vessel. It should be noted that these requirements apply only to Solas ships operating in polar waters as defined within the Polar Code, and future amendments may broaden the scope of applicability to other ships, including fishing vessels and smaller coastal ships.

The Basic Polar Waters Certificate of Proficiency will be issued after completion of an approved basic course and proof of meeting the standard of competence outlined in A-V4 of STCW; no sea service is required for this level of certification. To obtain the Advanced Polar Waters Certificate of Proficiency, an officer must first complete the basic level requirements then accumulate at least two months of approved sea service, either at a management level or while watchkeeping in polar waters or approved equivalent waters. Revalidations will be required every five years.

There is consideration for a transitional period as the new requirements gradually come into force after 1 January 2018, allowing deck officers and masters to obtain interim certificates of proficiency that will be permitted until two years after coming into force.

For the Basic Certificate of Proficiency, the officer must:

- hold a current STCW Certificate of Competency and have either
- completed polar waters sea service, or approved equivalent, of three months in the preceding five years;
- or attended a training course, provided the course meets the requirements of STCW B-V/g.

For the Advanced level, a senior deck officer or master must:

- hold a current STCW Certificate of Competency;
- have commenced approved sea service in polar waters prior to the date of entry into force and either
- establish that they meet the competency requirements with three months' sea service at the management level in the previous five years
- or have completed an approved course and completed two months' sea service in

polar waters, or equivalent seagoing service.

At present there are no 'approved' courses, although non-approved courses appear alongside a number of ice navigation courses that have existed for numerous years in institutions experienced in ice and polar training. In some cases, guidance has been developed to cover the interim, such as the United States Coast Guard's guidance document 16715 CG-OES Policy Letter – *Guidelines for Training Personnel on Ships Subject to the International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code)*.

IMO is expected to approve model courses for the Basic level at the fourth meeting of IMO's Sub-Committee

on Human Element, Training and Watchkeeping (HTW 4) in late January 2017. Several administrations have submitted draft model courses for IMO acceptance at the meeting but these courses are intended to meet only the specific requirements laid out in the Polar Code and the related STCW amendments.

As many who have been involved in the process admit, the courses will not address many concerns raised by operators and flag states with respect to actual ice operations competency and experience. Several institutions have conducted well developed 'ice navigation' courses over the years, and point out that IMO's requirements tend to be more

LEFT: Polar Code/STCW training and certification misses a requirement for sea service in ice-infested waters (credit: Duke Snider)

focused on theoretical and regulatory knowledge at the expense of addressing the need to meet competency and proficiency in handling ships in ice.

For many, the most flagrant gap in Polar Code/STCW training and certification is this lack of requirement for sea service in ice-infested waters. This absence is causing concern in the experienced polar shipping community because a lack of experience within ice-covered waters is a clear safety weakness to all but those vessels that are guaranteed to operate in ice-free waters.

Some operators, insurers and other agencies are looking for standards above the present Polar Code requirements. In particular, the Nautical Institute is continuing to pursue implementation of its Ice Navigator Training Accreditation and Ice Navigator Certification schemes.

These schemes are intended to complement the requirements of the Polar Code and fill the gap, putting in place a recognised level of certification that ensures officers meet basic and advanced levels of skill in handling ships in ice, whether inside or outside polar waters. Once in place, the schemes will accredit training institutions that meet the Polar Code/STCW requirements and address additional needs to ensure competence and proficiency in operating vessels in ice-infested waters. The accompanying certification scheme will measure individuals against a known and common standard of proficiency and competence. [SPC](#)

Ice Conditions	Tanker	Passenger	Other
Ice-free	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
Open waters	Basic training for master, chief mate and officers in charge of a navigational watch	Basic training for master, chief mate and officers in charge of a navigational watch	Not applicable
Above open water (ice coverage above 10%)	Advanced training for master and chief mate. Basic training for officers in charge of a navigational watch	Advanced training for master and chief mate. Basic training for officers in charge of a navigational watch	Advanced training for master and chief mate. Basic training for officers in charge of a navigational watch