



National Maritime Occupational Health and Safety Committee

Safety Familiarisation: Guidelines to Shipping Companies

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Aims	3
3. Legal and Regulatory Framework	4
Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention	4
Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006	4
ILO Maritime Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH) Guide	4
Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers (CoSWP)	4
4. Core Components of Safety Familiarisation	4
Frequency of Familiarisation	4
– Initial Familiarisation	4
– Familiarisation Versus Handover	4
Duration and Depth of Training	5
– Variations by Rank and Duties	5
– Previous Experience and Familiarisation on Sister Ships	5
5. Content of Safety Familiarisation Programmes	5
General Safety Procedures	5
Emergency Procedures	5
– Fire Safety and Response	5
– Abandon Ship Protocols	5
Ship-Specific Arrangements and Equipment	5
– Ship Layout	5
Company Policies and Procedures	6
Environmental Protection Measures	6
6. Instruction and Learning Methods	6
Practical	6
E-Learning and Digital Resources	6
– Online Modules and Assessment	6
7. Roles and Responsibilities	6
Designated Manager for Familiarisation	6
Responsibilities of Crew Members	6
8. Monitoring and Evaluation	7
Assessment of Familiarisation Effectiveness	7
Continuous Improvement of Programmes	7
Feedback Mechanisms	7
9. Appendices	8
Annex A: Excerpts from STCW Code, MLC Guidelines and the Code of Safe Working Practices	8

1. Introduction

Purpose of the Guidance

The purpose of this document is to assist shipping companies in complying with the requirement to provide all crew members with safety familiarisation prior to commencing their duties on board. These high-level guidelines set out recommended minimum standards for safety familiarisation practices across shipping companies, ensuring compliance with international regulations and enhancing the safety and operational efficiency of their operations.

Scope of the Document

This document provides comprehensive guidance on the elements, frequency, and delivery methods of safety familiarisation for seafarers. It covers all ranks and duties within a ship's crew and is designed to be of use to operators of all ship types and applicable to ships of all flags.

Target Audience

The guidance is addressed primarily to shipping company management, safety officers, training coordinators and other stakeholders involved in crew training and safety management. Additionally, it serves as a resource for regulatory bodies and maritime trade unions.

Structure of the Document

The document is structured to link regulatory requirements to practical implementation. It includes specific guidelines and instructional methods to ensure comprehensive and effective safety familiarisation.

2. Aims

By ensuring crew members receive appropriate on-board familiarisation before assuming their ship-board duties these guidelines aim to:

- Promote the health, safety, and welfare of seafarers.
- Contribute to safer shipboard environments.
- Ensure the effective functioning of safety and emergency procedures on board.
- Reduce accidents and injuries on board ships.
- Encourage improvements in safety performance.
- Ensure that crew members receive training in safe work procedures.

3. Legal and Regulatory Framework (see Appendix A)

Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention

The STCW Convention sets out international standards for seafarer training, certification, and watchkeeping. Regulation I/14 makes companies responsible for ensuring that all seafarers are familiarised with their specific duties and all ship-specific arrangements. Regulation VI/1 mandates that seafarers receive safety familiarisation before being assigned to shipboard duties

Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006

Regulation 1.3 requires that seafarers are trained or certified as competent or otherwise qualified to perform their duties and have successfully completed training for personal safety before commencing work on board a ship. Standard A4.3, paragraph 1(a), also requires that the occupational and health policies and programmes include training and instruction of seafarers. It should be noted that the MLC defines a seafarer as any person who is employed or engaged or works onboard a ship to which the MLC applies. There is no minimum tonnage threshold for application of the MLC.

ILO Guidelines for implementing the occupational safety and health provisions of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MOSH Guide).

These guidelines contain information on the requirement for safety familiarisation and recommendations for what it should include.

Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers (CoSWP)

The CoSWP outlines best practices for safe working procedures, including safety induction and familiarisation for new and returning seafarers. Section 2 specifically addresses the design and implementation of standard induction programmes tailored to each vessel's needs.

4. Core Components of Safety Familiarisation

Frequency of Familiarisation

Initial Familiarisation

All crew members must receive initial safety familiarisation before commencing their duties on board. This includes a thorough introduction to the ship's layout, safety procedures and locations and use of emergency equipment, including through a tour of the ship. Initial familiarisation should ensure that new crew members can effectively perform their duties and respond to emergencies.

Familiarisation Versus Handover

It is important to note that familiarisation and handover are two separate elements of the on-boarding process. This should be reflected in the safety management system. **Handover** refers to the transfer of responsibilities, ongoing tasks and operational knowledge from the off-signing crew member to the incoming crew member whereas **Familiarisation** is an introduction to the ship, its layout, equipment, safety procedures and company policies.

Duration and Depth of Familiarisation

Variations by Rank and Duties

The duration and depth of familiarisation should be related to the rank and duties of the crew members. Higher-ranking officers and those with more critical safety roles may require more extensive familiarisation to cover their additional responsibilities.

Previous Experience and Familiarisation on Sister Ships

The familiarisation programme for incoming crew members may consider previous experience, length of service with the company and familiarisation with similar vessels. However, experience and tenure do not replace the need for thorough familiarisation with the vessel. Crew members with prior experience on sister ships may require less intensive familiarisation, but all personnel must complete the vessel-specific induction to ensure full operational and safety awareness.

5. Content of Safety Familiarisation Programmes

General Safety Procedures

Familiarisation with general safety procedures should cover the following:

- Communication protocols, including the use of radios and emergency signals
- Use of personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate to the vessel and duties
- Basic safety rules and regulations, including hazard reporting and accident prevention
- The ship's rules regarding carriage and use of mobile phones
- Stop work authority
- Permit to work systems
- Enclosed and dangerous space entry
- Near miss reporting

Emergency Procedures

Fire Safety and Response

Crew members should be familiarised with the ship's fire detection, alarm systems, firefighting equipment and evacuation procedures. This includes practical drills on using fire extinguishers, fire hoses, and breathing apparatus when local regulations and port operations permit.

Abandon Ship Protocols

Familiarisation with life-saving appliances, muster stations, and abandonment drills is crucial. Crew members should know how to locate and use lifeboats, liferafts and other survival equipment.

Ship-Specific Arrangements and Equipment

Ship Layout

Understanding the ship's layout, including escape routes, muster stations and key safety equipment locations is essential. Familiarisation should include tours of the vessel to show the location of emergency exits and safety equipment such as fire extinguishers, breathing apparatus and personal protective equipment.

Company Policies and Procedures

An overview of the company's safety management system, including reporting procedures for hazards, incidents and near misses, should be included, with specific emphasis on "stop work authority". This ensures that crew members understand their responsibilities and the company's expectations regarding safety. Familiarisation with the permit to work system is essential.

Environmental Protection Measures

An understanding of procedures to prevent pollution and manage waste according to MARPOL regulations is a fundamental element of familiarisation with shipboard activities and should cover handling hazardous materials, spill response, and waste disposal procedures. The segregation and management of garbage and waste products, including the operation of incinerating equipment, should be included.

6. Instruction and Learning Methods

The following methodologies for conducting familiarisation and safety briefings should be considered where appropriate, unless they are not practicable or feasible due to in-port operations.

Practical

Accompanied tour of vessel by off-signing crew member or designated person to ensure understanding of areas specified in sections 4 and 5 of these guidelines.

E-Learning and Digital Resources

Online Modules and Assessments

Utilising e-learning platforms to provide flexible and accessible familiarisation options is recommended.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Designated Manager for Familiarisation

An experienced officer, typically the ship's Safety Officer, should be appointed to oversee the familiarisation process. This officer is responsible for ensuring that all crew members complete their familiarisation, have received necessary induction and are deemed ready to assume their duties.

Responsibilities of Crew Members

Crew members are responsible for actively participating in the familiarisation process and for adhering to safety procedures. They should take personal responsibility for understanding and following safety protocols.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

Assessment of Familiarisation Effectiveness

Regular assessments and audits to evaluate the effectiveness of familiarisation programmes should be conducted. These assessments can include tests, drills and performance evaluations. The Ship's Safety Representatives and Safety Committee should review the shipboard familiarisation programmes regularly and the company should act on any recommendations arising from this.

Continuous Improvement of Programmes

Feedback from assessments should be used to continuously improve familiarisation programmes. This includes updating training materials and methods to reflect new regulations and best practices.

Feedback Mechanisms

Establishing mechanisms for crew members to provide feedback on the familiarisation process is important. This should involve the Shipboard Safety Committee and can also include surveys and suggestion boxes.



9. Appendices

Annex A: Excerpts from STCW Code, MLC, MOSH Guidelines and the Code of Safe Working Practices

Relevant sections of the STCW Code, MLC, MOSH Guidelines and the Code of Safe Working Practices should be included for reference. This provides a legal basis for the guidelines and helps ensure compliance.

1. STCW Section A-VI/1 – Safety Familiarisation and Basic Training

1.1 General Familiarisation

Before being assigned to shipboard duties, all persons employed or engaged on a seagoing ship, other than passengers, shall receive approved familiarisation training to be able to:

- Communicate with other persons on board on elementary safety matters and understand safety information symbols, signs, and alarm signals.
- Know what to do if:
 - A person falls overboard;
 - Fire or smoke is detected; or
 - The fire or abandon ship alarm is sounded.
- Identify muster and embarkation stations and emergency escape routes.
- Locate and don lifejackets.
- Raise the alarm and have basic knowledge of the use of portable fire-extinguishers.
- Take immediate action upon encountering an accident or medical emergency before seeking further assistance.
- Close and open the fire, weathertight, and watertight doors fitted in the ship, other than those for hull openings.

2. MLC 2006

Regulation 1.3 – Training and qualifications

1. Seafarers shall not work on a ship unless they are trained or certified as competent or otherwise qualified to perform their duties.
2. Seafarers shall not be permitted to work on a ship unless they have successfully completed training for personal safety on board ship.
3. Training and certification in accordance with the mandatory instruments adopted by the International Maritime Organization shall be considered as meeting the requirements of paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Regulation.

Regulation 4.3 – Health and safety protection and accident prevention

3. Each Member shall adopt laws and regulations and other measures addressing the matters specified in the Code, taking into account relevant international instruments, and set standards for occupational safety and health protection and accident prevention on ships that fly its flag.

Standard A4.3 – Health and safety protection and accident prevention

1. The laws and regulations and other measures to be adopted in accordance with Regulation 4.3, paragraph 3, shall include the following subjects:
 - c) on-board programmes for the prevention of occupational accidents, injuries and diseases and for continuous improvement in occupational safety and health protection, involving seafarers' representatives and all other persons concerned in their implementation, taking account of preventive measures, including engineering and design control, substitution of processes and procedures for collective and individual tasks, and the use of personal protective equipment; and
 - d) requirements for inspecting, reporting and correcting unsafe conditions and for investigating and reporting on-board occupational accidents.

3. MOSH Guide – On-Board Familiarisation

3.1 Purpose

The Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006 requires all seafarers to be familiarised with the ship and its safety procedures before commencing duties, ensuring safe work practices and emergency preparedness.

3.2 On-Board Familiarisation

- Location of lifesaving and fire-fighting equipment.
- Shipboard safety procedures and emergency response protocols.
- Muster stations and emergency escape routes.
- Operation of safety equipment relevant to their duties.
- Ship-specific hazards and safety information.

3.3 Compliance with International Standards

Training in accordance with STCW or other IMO-mandated instruments satisfies the MLC familiarisation requirement. Seafarers should demonstrate understanding of the training prior to performing duties.

3.4 Documentation and Responsibility

- Shipowners/operators must maintain records of familiarisation training, including:
 - Date of training
 - Content covered
 - Confirmation that the seafarer has demonstrated understanding
- Familiarisation must occur before assignment to shipboard duties.

4. Code of Safe Working Practices (section 2)

4.1 Vessel familiarisation training

Before they are assigned to shipboard duties, all personnel employed or engaged on a ship, other than passengers, must have familiarisation training on board and be given enough information and instruction to be able to:

- communicate with other people on board on elementary safety matters and understand safety information symbols, signs and alarm signals
- know what to do if:
 - a person falls overboard
 - fire or smoke is detected
 - the fire or abandon ship alarm is sounded
- identify alarm points, muster and embarkation stations, and emergency escape routes
- locate and don lifejackets
- know how to use portable fire extinguishers
- take immediate action upon encountering an accident or other medical emergency before seeking further medical assistance on board
- close and open the fire, weathertight and watertight doors fitted in the particular ship other than those for hull openings.

For more information on topics covered in this chapter, see MCA's Wellbeing at Sea: A Guide for Organisations, section 2.1.9.

Emergency procedures and fire precautions

- All new personnel should be given a clear explanation of the vessel's alarm signals, and instruction on the emergency assembly stations, life saving appliances and fire fighting equipment.

5. Combined Responsibilities

- STCW, MLC 2006 and CoSWP require that familiarisation occurs prior to the commencement of duties.
- Training must cover emergency procedures, equipment operation, and ship-specific safety hazards.
- Records of training must be kept and accessible for verification and compliance purposes.

Disclaimer

These extracts are provided for convenience and do not replace the full, official texts of the STCW Convention and Code or the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (including all amendments) or the Code of Safe Working Practices. Users should consult the complete documents and any relevant national legislation to ensure full legal compliance.