



SUB-COMMITTEE ON SHIP DESIGN AND
EQUIPMENT
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Agenda item 9

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AMENDMENTS TO THE GUIDELINES FOR SHIPS OPERATING IN ARCTIC ICE-COVERED WATERS

Ramifications of mandatory application of aspects of the Polar Guidelines

Submitted by the United States

SUMMARY

Executive summary: At MSC 79, documents were submitted by the Secretariat regarding decisions and a request by the XXVIIth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) to revise MSC/Circ.1056-MEPC/Circ.399 – Guidelines for ships operating in Arctic ice-covered waters to, among other things, make it applicable to the Antarctic. In light of the increased interests and traffic in both the Arctic and Antarctic, and the unique navigational, structural, environmental and SAR concerns peculiar to these areas, this document informs the Sub-Committee of the United States intent to propose a new work programme item to MSC that the current efforts to revise MSC/Circ.1056-MEPC/Circ.399 be expanded to consider mandatory requirements.

Strategic direction: 5.2

High-level action: 5.2.1

Planned output: 5.2.1.1

Action to be taken: Paragraph 7

Related documents: DE 52/9/1; MSC/Circ.1056-MEPC/Circ.399; MSC 79/8/2 and MSC 79/INF.2

Introduction

1 At MSC 79, the Secretariat introduced a document, MSC 79/8/2, which informed the Committee of decisions taken by the XXVIIth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM), as well as a request to IMO to revise MSC/Circ.1056-MEPC/Circ.399 – Guidelines for ships operating in Arctic ice-covered waters to, among other things, make it applicable to the Antarctic. The United States supports those revisions of MSC/Circ.1056-MEPC/Circ.399 to broaden the scope of its application to include those ships transiting in Antarctic waters. Further, the United States is submitting a proposal to the Maritime Safety Committee for a new work programme item to recast these guidelines as mandatory requirements.

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2 The United States believes this action is necessary in order to better address the increasing potential for an adverse impact on marine safety and the marine environment in the Polar Regions resulting from the increased traffic of ships, amounts of cargo, and numbers of persons in these regions. The United States is proposing to the Committee to include a new item in the work programme of the Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Equipment, and other sub-committees as appropriate, to revise these guidelines, once adopted for both Polar Regions, as mandatory requirements. This effort should include a review of those areas where older ships, under other circumstances, might have traditionally been grandfathered to determine whether it is appropriate to maintain such a grandfathering in light of the potential impact on the safety of life or the protection of the environment.

3 Several factors demonstrate the need for this effort. There is growing interest by members and commercial entities in the Polar Regions. There is a significant increase in ship traffic, types and volume of cargo, and numbers of persons travelling to these Polar Regions for commercial reasons, including tourism. There are currently no regulations in effect for ships operating in these locales that specifically address the safety and environmental concerns arising from operating in such remote and rugged locales. Moreover, SOLAS does not specifically address marine activities in the “ice-covered water” environment. Additionally, given the remoteness, vastness, and lack of infrastructure in the Polar Regions, IMO needs to evaluate such issues as the adequacy of resources for search and rescue and other emergency response capabilities. Such increases in interest and activity require IMO to consider the need for establishing polar shipping regulations. The ATCM had asked IMO to revise MSC/Circ.1056-MEPC/Circ.399 in order to include the Antarctic because the IMO’s membership encompasses far more States than the comparatively few that are Party to the Antarctic Treaty.

4 Additionally, there are no requirements for specialized training and certification standards and crew qualifications for ships transiting the Arctic or Antarctic. This is not stating that such requirements should be the same for both regions, but merely noting that no such requirements currently exist for either region. As the Organization has long noted, the human element is usually a causal factor in roughly 80% of maritime accidents.

5 In addition, search and rescue and environmental response capabilities are inadequate in the Arctic and Antarctic. Emergency response is critically limited by the lack of all types of infrastructure in these vast, remote Polar Regions.

6 The subject areas outlined above that are within the remit of other Committees (MEPC) or Sub-Committees (COMSAR, SLF, STW), are provided for information purposes only. It is not intended that the DE Sub-Committee discuss those subject areas.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

7 The Sub-Committee is invited to consider the above comments and:

- .1 discuss the ramifications of those aspects of the Polar Guidelines that are within the competence of the Sub-Committee;
 - .2 reflect this discussion in the report of the Sub-Committee for the benefit of the Committee.
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