



What is changing for shipping in 2026

With a new year comes new regulatory changes. For the maritime industry, this year's changes focus heavily on operational safety, introducing more stringent standards for fire-fighting equipment, life-saving appliances, cargo securing, and winch operations.

Published 04 February 2026

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The industry is also prioritizing social welfare by strengthening mandatory crew training on harassment and assault prevention. Complementing these safety and human-centric reforms is a continued push for environmental stewardship, evidenced by revised protocols regarding fuel quality, emission limits, and overall pollution control. This article provides an overview of the regulatory changes being implemented in 2026.

Changes from 1 January 2026

MSC.532(107) : SOLAS II-1/3-13 (Lifting Appliances and Anchor Handling Winches)

The new SOLAS Regulation II-1/3-13, introduces mandatory safety standards for lifting appliances and anchor handling winches on ships. It covers cargo cranes, engine-room cranes, stores cranes, hose-handling cranes, and associated loose gear. All new installations must comply with classification society standards, undergo load testing and thorough examination before first use, and be permanently marked with their Safe Working Load. Existing equipment must meet marking and testing requirements by the first renewal survey after 2026, with prior valid certificates remaining acceptable. Regular inspection, operational testing, and adherence to IMO guidelines are required for maintenance, including dynamic load considerations and periodic retesting.

MSC.520(106) : SOLAS II-2/A & B (Flashpoint of Oil Fuel)

The updated requirements are designed to prevent the supply of fuels in breach of the minimum flashpoint limit in SOLAS Chapter II-2. Prior bunkering, suppliers must provide a declaration confirming compliance with Regulation III/2/4.2.1 and stating the test method used. The Bunker Delivery Note (BDN) must show the flashpoint, or confirm that it is at least 70°C. Furthermore, ships are not required to test the flashpoint when the BDN is compliant. However, if the fuel is subsequently found to be non-compliant, the case must be reported to the relevant authority. Contracting Governments must report confirmed non-compliance to the IMO and take enforcement action against suppliers. The amendments also introduce new definitions for “confirmed case (flashpoint),” “representative sample,” and “oil fuel.”

MSC.559(108) & [MSC.535\(107\)](#) : SOLAS III/20 & 30, and LSA Code 4.4 (Lifeboats)

Annual thorough examination and operational testing of lifeboats, rescue boats, and fast rescue boats must be carried out by certified personnel from the manufacturer or an authorized service provider. Ventilation systems on totally enclosed lifeboats are now a mandatory part of the annual examination and testing. From 2029, new totally enclosed lifeboats must provide at least 5 m³/h of ventilation per person for 24 hours. After any maintenance or repair, the service provider must also issue a statement confirming that the equipment is fit for purpose.

[MSC.550\(108\)](#) & [MSC.555\(108\)](#) : SOLAS II-2/7 & 20, and FSS Code (Ro-Ro Passenger Ships)

The amendments introduce mandatory fixed smoke and heat detection systems in vehicles, special category, and ro/ro spaces, including video monitoring and integration with the fire alarm system. Weather decks must also be equipped with fixed water-based fire-extinguishing monitors and improved drainage capacity. Detector spacing and overall system design have been updated to provide better coverage and reliability. Existing ships must comply with these requirements at the first survey on or after 1 January 2028.

[MSC.532\(107\)](#) : SOLAS II-2/10.11 (PFOS Prohibition)

The amendments prohibit the use and carriage of fire-extinguishing media containing perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) due to associated environmental and health risks. New ships may not use or store PFOS-containing media, and existing ships must remove such media by the first survey after 2026. Ships must also carry documentation or test reports confirming that their fire-extinguishing media are PFOS-free. If this documentation is unavailable, onboard sampling and laboratory analysis is required.

[MSC.532\(107\)](#) : SOLAS V/19/2.12 (Electronic Inclinometer)

Effective for new constructions, all containerships and bulk carriers of 3,000 GT and above must now be equipped with an electronic inclinometer or an equivalent system designed to measure and record roll motion. This mandatory requirement, now reflected in the updated Safety Equipment Certificate, ensures that the Voyage Data Recorder (VDR) can accurately capture and display the vessel's rolling behavior to provide vital stability information. Notably, these regulations do not apply retrospectively to existing ships, nor do they extend to existing bulk carriers and container ships or to cargo ships occasionally carrying cargo in bulk and general cargo ships carrying containers on deck.

[MSC.550\(108\)](#) : SOLAS V/31 & 32 (Danger Messages - Containers Lost at Sea)

The amendments require the immediate reporting of lost or sighted containers to nearby vessels, coastal States, and the ship's flag State. Reports must include the ship's identification, the time and position of the loss, the number of containers involved, details of any hazardous cargo, and other relevant information. Flag States must report confirmed container losses to the IMO's GISIS database. Please refer to Gard article '[Mandatory reporting of containers lost at sea starts 1 January 2026](#)' for further details.

MSC.532 (107) & MSC.538 (107) : Polar Code and SOLAS XIV/2 (Navigation and Voyage Planning)

The amendments expand Polar Code safety requirements to certain non-SOLAS ships operating in polar waters. These ships must be able to receive and display current ice information, be equipped with dual echo-sounders, and plan voyages with consideration for ice conditions, SAR coverage, environmental sensitivities, and hydrographic limitations. Existing ships in the newly covered categories must comply by 1 January 2027.

MSC.560(108) : STCW VI/1 & Table A-VI/1-4 (Harassment Training)

The amendments introduce mandatory updates to Basic Safety Training, specifically within STCW Table A-VI/1-4 – Personal Safety and Social Responsibilities (PSSR). It now includes mandatory competence in recognizing, intervening, and reporting harassment and assault, including trauma-informed response. This requirement applies to all seafarers undertaking Basic Safety Training (PSSR) from 2026 onward. There is some uncertainty as to how the requirements are to be implemented for seafarers who have completed PSSR training before 1 January 2026. This ambiguity is evidenced by conflicting national directives, such as UK MCA states "*Existing seafarers who already hold a valid PSSR certificate are not required to complete additional training to meet these amendments. This position is consistent with IMO circular guidance, although clarification is being sought at the IMO in February 2026 to address global uncertainty on this matter*" (refer Guidance MIN 729 (M)+(F): 2026 IMO Amendment to PSSR); whereas DG Shipping of India states that "*existing officers, ratings and trainees, when ashore, are required to complete the e-learning programme... Seafarers currently serving onboard may complete the said course after signing off and before joining next vessel on or after 01st Jan 2026*" (refer DG Circular 53 of 2025).

MSC.524(106) & MSC.551(108) : IGF and IGC Codes (Materials and Bunkering Safety)

High-manganese austenitic steel is now approved for cryogenic service in fuel tanks and pressure vessels, with strict requirements for chemical composition and impact testing. Emergency release systems (ERS) are mandatory at bunkering stations, and pressure relief valve (PRV) redundancy is required. Hazardous-area classification has been tightened, with some spaces now reclassified as Zone 0. Written transfer procedures and portable dry-powder extinguishers are also required at bunkering stations.

MSC.556(108) : IMDG Code (Amendment 42-24)

The amendments update the classification, packing, marking, and documentation requirements for dangerous goods, including lithium batteries and environmentally hazardous substances. They also strengthen emergency-response procedures and align maritime rules with other international transport frameworks. New requirements for security, stowage, segregation, and emergency response are introduced as part of these changes.

MSC.552(108) : International Grain Code (Annex Part A – 2.8)

The amendments formally add the loading condition “partly filled in way of the hatch opening, with ends untrimmed” to the Grain Code. Grain Loading Manuals and loading-computer systems must be updated accordingly, and stability calculations and supporting documentation are required. Revised manuals must also be approved by the flag administration or a recognized organization. We understand that these amendments apply to new buildings with keel laid on or after 1 January 2026, and to existing ships wishing to use the new loading condition for improved flexibility and compliance. For existing ships, the amended Grain Code can also be applied to improve loading flexibility and demonstrate compliance with the new requirements. Please refer to Gard article '[The Grain Code is being revised – are you ready?](#)' for further details.

MSC.553(108) : 2011 ESP Code (Thickness Measurement Firms)

The amendments standardize approval and auditing procedures for firms that conduct hull-thickness measurements. After the document review, an audit is required to verify the company's organization, management, and technical competence. For oil tankers, the requirements for submitting documentation have also been clarified.

MSC.288(87) , MSC.558(108) : PSPC (Coating Inspectors Qualification)

Inspector, FROSIO Inspector Level III, or an equivalent certification. Shipyards must maintain a Coating Technical File (CTF) that includes complete records of coating specifications, application, inspection, and maintenance. Pre-qualification testing, DFT measurements, and proper control of environmental conditions are also required.

MSC.1/Circ.1686: IAMSAR (2026 Edition - Volumes I, II, and III)

All three volumes have been updated to reflect new SAR procedures, including GMDSS changes, night search guidance, and considerations for offshore wind farm operations. SOLAS ships must carry the latest edition of Volume III in hard copy. New templates and forms have also been introduced to support international cooperation and coordination.

[Directive 2003/87/EC](#) & [Regulation \(EU\) 2023/957](#) : EU-ETS & MRV Regulation (Final Phase)

The EU Emissions Trading System (EU-ETS) and the MRV Regulation now apply to 100% of CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O emissions from voyages between EU ports, 50% of emissions from EU–non-EU voyages, and 100% of emissions while ships are at berth. Ships of 5,000 GT and above must purchase and surrender EU Allowances (EUAs) under the cap-and-trade system. Annual emissions reporting and the surrender of allowances are mandatory.

MSC.530(106) : ECDIS updates

Revised performance standards for electronic chart display and information systems (ECDIS) introduce a phased implementation of new International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) product specifications (i.e. S-98, S-100 and S-101) for ECDIS, including the capability of digital exchange of ships' route plans. MSC.530(106)/Rev.1 applies to new ECDIS installations from 1 January 2026 on a voluntary basis, and for all new ECDIS installations from 1 January 2029.

PMSC (Port & Maritime Facilities Safety Code, UK)

This is domestic guidance issued by the UK Government, and its scope of application is limited to marine facilities within the United Kingdom, such as ports, marinas, and terminals. From 1 January 2026, updating safety management systems (MSMS) in line with the revised PMSC becomes mandatory, along with compliance declarations by Duty Holders. The revised requirements also introduce new elements such as bridging documents and the implementation of both Formal and Dynamic Risk Assessments.

New Bunkering Rules in Rotterdam and Antwerp-Bruges

In the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp-Bruges, all bunker vessels will be required to be equipped with a certified Mass Flow Meter (MFM). Fuel suppliers must hold a valid bunkering licence issued by the port authorities and comply with strict requirements such as pre-registration through Portbase and submission of operational logs. These measures aim to reduce quantity discrepancies and disputes, enhance transparency, and strengthen traceability for fuels including biofuels. Under the new regime, audits and inspections will be intensified, and violations may result in fines or suspension of the bunkering licence.

Changes from 1 March 2026

[MEPC.392\(82\)](#) : MARPOL Annex VI (Canadian Arctic & Norwegian Sea ECAs)

The amendments designate the Canadian Arctic and the Norwegian Sea as new Emission Control Areas (ECAs), with strict requirements for NOx Tier III, SOx ($\leq 0.10\% \text{ m/m}$), and particulate matter. These standards apply to ships constructed on or after the specified dates when operating within these ECAs. The geographical boundaries and detailed technical requirements are provided in the official annexes.

Changes from 1 May 2026

China's Maritime Code

The amended Chinese Maritime Code will come into effect on 1 May 2026. The revision strengthens alignment with international standards, clarifies the rights and obligations of parties to maritime transport contracts, and enhances support for digitalization. Key points include adjustments to the liability system, clearer definitions of the carrier's obligations, promotion of the use of electronic documents, and clarification of applicable regulations. The amendment also aims to improve the balance of responsibilities between shippers and carriers and to enhance the efficiency of dispute resolution.

Changes from 1 July 2026

[MSC.554\(108\)](#) : LSA Code

The amendments set minimum and maximum lowering speeds for survival craft and rescue boats to reduce dangerous impact forces during water entry. The maximum lowering speed is limited to 1.3 m/s unless otherwise approved by the Administration, and systems must be designed to ensure this speed is not exceeded.

[MSC.566\(109\)](#) : IGC Code (Use of Cargo as Fuel)

The amendments allow certain toxic cargoes (Type 2G/2PG) to be used as fuel for gas carriers, provided safety equivalent to methane can be demonstrated. Type 1G cargoes remain prohibited for use as fuel. Compliance with the IGC Code and relevant IMO guidelines is required.

UK Emissions Trading Scheme (Maritime Scope Expansion)

The UK Government has confirmed the expansion of the UK ETS to maritime transport from 1 July 2026. This move introduces an additional layer of regulatory liability alongside the existing EU ETS, mandating that ships of 5,000 GT and above account for CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O emissions during domestic voyages between UK ports, including round trips and all in-port emissions. Certain exemptions remain, such as government non-commercial activities, some ferry services, and fishing vessels. The first compliance year will run from 1 July to 31 December 2026, then align with the calendar year.

Changes from 1 September 2026

[MEPC.398\(83\) MEPC 83-17-Add.1 - Annex 2 : NOx Technical Code 2008 \(Certification and Testing\)](#)

The amendments clarify and streamline certification procedures for engines following major modifications or Tier changes. They introduce new flowcharts and documentation requirements, while NOx emission limits remain unchanged. The Engine Emission Test Plan must also be agreed with the Administration in advance.

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