



New IMO procedures for maintenance and inspection of life-saving appliances

Seafarers should be able to fully rely on the IMO-mandated life-saving appliances and equipment at their disposal, says the IMO.

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In May 2016, the IMO Maritime Safety Committee's 96th session ([MSC 96](#)) adopted amendments to SOLAS regulations III/3 and III/20. These amendments enter into force on **1 January 2020** and introduce mandatory new requirements for the maintenance and inspection of lifeboats and rescue boats, launching appliances and release gear to be carried out by 'certified personnel' as per [Resolution MSC.402\(96\)](#)).

The provisions aim to prevent accidents with survival craft and address longstanding issues such as the need for uniform, safe and documented standards related to the servicing of these appliances. “ *The intention is to ensure that seafarers can be confident that they can fully rely on the IMO-mandated life-saving appliances and equipment at their disposal* ”, says the IMO.

To summarise:

- Equipment
 - lifeboats (including free-fall lifeboats), rescue boats and fast rescue boats; and
 - launching appliances and on-load and off-load release gear for lifeboats (including primary and secondary means of launching appliances for free-fall lifeboats), rescue boats, fast rescue boats and davit-launched liferafts.

covered by the new requirements include:

- Weekly and monthly inspections and routine maintenance of such equipment must be carried out by authorized service providers, or by shipboard personnel under the direction of a senior ship's officer in accordance with the maintenance manual(s).
- Annual thorough examinations and operational tests must be carried out by certified personnel of either the manufacturer or an authorized service provider. The service provider may be the ship operator, provided they are authorized.
- Five-year thorough examination, any overhaul, overload operational tests and repairs of such equipment, must be carried out by certified personnel of either the manufacturer or an authorized service provider.
- Authorized service providers are entities authorized by the flag administration in accordance with Sections 3 and 7 of Resolution MSC.402(96). It is important to note that the requirements apply equally to manufacturers when they are acting as authorized service providers.
- Certification is issued by authorized service providers to their personnel. Each authorized service provider must certify its personnel for each make and type of equipment to be worked on, as well as for the specific work activities to be carried out, such as annual or five-yearly inspections. Completion of relevant education and training, including a competence assessment using the equipment for which the personnel are to be certified, is a prerequisite for certification.

The scope of the required inspections and operational tests are further described in Section 6 of Resolution MSC.402(96). Instructions for on-board maintenance are described in SOLAS regulation III/36.

Recommendations

Shipowners and operators should prepare for the new requirements by updating onboard procedures and establishing an overview of authorized service providers in relevant areas prior to the requirement entering into force on 1 January 2020.

We also take this opportunity to remind operators of the importance of proper onboard crew training as insufficient onboard procedures and crew competence have been identified as contributing factors in many lifeboat and rescue boat accidents. While crew members that have obtained a formal “*Certificate of proficiency in survival craft, rescue boats and fast rescue boats*” from recognised training institutions have demonstrated sufficient competence and knowledge to enable them to, in general terms, take charge of a survival craft or rescue boat during and after launch, they may not be properly trained to operate the type of lifeboat and rescue boat carried on board their own ship of employment.