

Updating training – don't get caught out!

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When the STCW Convention was conceived in 1978 and finally came into force in 1984 there was no requirement for mandatory safety training. This only changed with the 1995 Amendments coming into force in 2002 and we have since grown accustomed to all seafarers having to complete the STCW Basic Safety Training before going to sea and officers having to complete advanced STCW safety training.

With the 2010 Manila Amendments to the STCW Code coming into force on 1st January 2017, there is something new to get accustomed to: **Updating training.**

The good news first: It is relatively painless; updating training consists of very short courses, with the duration never exceeding one day. They will only have to be completed every five years. Also, they “only” affect the elements related to fire fighting and sea survival. PSSR, Medical and security training is not affected by five-yearly updating requirements. Those who hold a Certificate of Competency (CoC) which predates the STCW 1995 amendments and hence never had to do STCW safety training don't have to go back to do the full courses, they are allowed access to the (much shorter) updating courses straight away.

You could ask, why all this? The reason given by the IMO is “skills fade”, a phenomenon which affects us all and which describes how we forget skills that we once learned but rarely ever put into practice. It is estimated that we have forgotten 60% of everything we learnt on a safety course after only six months. Skills related to fire fighting and sea survival were deemed too important to simply ignore the possibility of skills fade.

Also, some seafarers may have done their STCW safety courses a long time ago, or, as mentioned above, never done these courses in first place. Yet, techniques and technologies, in particular for firefighting, have evolved tremendously over that period.

The UK's interpretation of the Manila Amendments has been known since 2014 and remained largely unchanged ever since. They were initially announced in a series of MINs and eventually superseded by MSN 1865, which defines all

UK requirements for updating training. Last month MIN 520 was issued which further clarifies access to these courses.



This is how it works: The requirement for a five-yearly updating training applies to the following five courses; Personal Survival Techniques (PST), Proficiency in Survival Craft and Rescue Boats (other than Fast Rescue Boats) (PSCRB), Proficiency in Fast Rescue Boats (FRB), Fire Prevention & Fire Fighting (FPFF) and Advanced Fire Fighting (AFF).

Which of these certificates the seafarer you will have to update depends on whether you hold a CoC or not and if so, which CoC you hold. A table makes it much easier to understand:

	No CoC (Deckhands, Ratings, Assistant Engineers) MCA Master 200GT	OOW (Yachts Less Than 3,000GT)	Chief Mate (Yachts Less Than 3,000GT), Master (Yachts less than 500GT/3,000GT), MEOL, Y4 to Y1 Engineering CoCs
Personal Survival Techniques (PST)	YES	YES	YES
Proficiency in Survival Craft and Rescue Boats (PSCRB)		YES	YES
Proficiency in Fast Rescue Boats (PFRB)		Only if the role on board requires the CoC holder to hold a Proficiency in Fast Rescue Boats	
Fire Prevention and Fire Fighting (FP&FF)	YES	YES	YES
Advanced Fire Fighting (AFF)			YES

The MNTB, MCA and IASST worked together to establish the details for the updating training courses. Warsash has trialled and then been running the updating courses since late 2014. With the exception of PST, which has a duration of ½ day, all other courses have a duration of one day.

From 1st January 2017 courses need updating whenever the initial course has been taken five or more years ago. Evidence of having completed the updated training will be required on a number of occasions including: when applying for a CoC; when revalidating an existing CoC; or for Port State Control (PSC). It is important to always carry the original course certificate on-board.

Just because these courses will have to be in date for the issue of a new CoC or the revalidation of an existing CoC, does not mean that when your CoC is in date you are exempt from updating. The best way to think about this is to compare it to the ENG1: When revalidating a CoC, the ENG1 must be in date. However if the ENG1 runs out shortly thereafter, it will have to be renewed. The same applies to the updating training: From 1st January 2017 you won't be able to sail without documentary evidence of having completed the original training course or the updating training within the last five years regardless of your CoC being in date or not.

Also, the updating of the advanced training module does not exempt the seafarer from updating the basic module. The reason for this is that content is widely different. Take fire fighting for example, where the updating course for the basic course primarily consists of practical exercises on the fire ground whereas updating for the advanced firefighting course consists of mainly theory based updates on new firefighting equipment and techniques.

For yacht CoCs only, non-STCW Advanced Sea Survival may still be accepted in lieu of Proficiency in Survival Craft and Rescue Boats, however, your CoC will contain the following negative endorsement: "Not for use on ships equipped with davit launched lifeboats". Non-STCW Advanced Sea Survival must be updated every five years in line with Proficiency in Survival Craft and Rescue Boats. MSN 1858 goes on to say: "The MCA would recommend that all seafarers hold an STCW Proficiency in Survival Craft and Rescue Boats Certificate of Proficiency. This is due to potential problems of Port State Control Officers outside of the UK, not accepting non-STCW Advanced Sea Survival." At the time of writing this article no updating course for Advanced Sea Survival had been defined. However, those holding a valid UK CoC will be given access to the PSCRN updating course, which will meet the requirement.

One final thing on updating: As mentioned before, medical courses are not affected by the new updating requirements. However, although the Proficiency in Medical Care (aka “Ship’s Captains Medical”) is not required to be updated under the STCW Code, on EU Member State flagged vessels, in accordance with EU Council Directive 92/29/EEC, the Captain and any person delegated person to use the medical type A supplies must receive special refresher training at least every five years. This is not a new requirement and has been in place for many years.

The Manila Amendments bring along a host of other changes too. We have already seen the implementation of ISPS Security courses. Other changes relevant to yachting coming into force in 2017 are as follows: ECDIS is now a mandatory requirement for the issue of a new OOW (yachts less than 3000GT), Chief Mate (yachts less than 3000 GT), Master (yachts less than 500 GT and 3000 GT) CoC. If you are applying for a Master Code Vessel, less than 200 GT, Certificate of Competency and do not complete an MCA-approved ECDIS course you will receive the following limitation: “From the 1 January 2017 this certificate is not valid for service on ships fitted with ECDIS”.

Last, but not least, and very important for those progressing to a Chief Mate CoC: As of 1st January 2017, EDH must have been completed at least 18 months before the MCA OOW (Yachts Less Than 3000GT) COC can be issued.

After reading the above I assume that everyone agrees these are the biggest changes to training and certification since the introduction of “STCW 95”. Whether one welcomes these requirements or not, the success of the updating requirements will also depend on the quality of the training courses and the attitude with which they are met. They should not be a tick box exercise; both trainers and crew are well advised to approach these courses with the seriousness they deserve. At the end of the day, there is simply too much at stake.

One thing is for sure; it is time to take action now. With the implementation date fast approaching course are filling up very quickly and availability might be very sparse towards the end of 2016. Take the time now to ensure you will comply so you don’t get left behind in 2017.

Disclaimer: Regulations and the interpretation thereof change on a regular basis. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of information, we cannot accept liability for any reliance on the text above. If in doubt, we advise you to contact the maritime authority relevant to yourself.

