

Merchant Marine Circular

Panama Maritime Authority
General Directorate of Merchant Marine
Control and Compliance Department

MERCHANT MARINE CIRCULAR MMC-288

- To:** Ship-owners/Operators, of Panamanian Flagged Vessels, Class Societies and Recognized Organizations (RO's).
- Subject:** Code of Safety for Special Purpose Ships, 2008, as amended.
- Reference:**
- a) Resolution MSC.266 (84) as amended, adopted by Resolution No. 106-OMI-126-DGMM.
 - b) Resolution A.534 (13) as amended, adopted by Resolution No. 106- OMI-148-DGMM.
 - c) Resolution MSC.453 (100) of 7 December 2018 and Resolution MSC.464(101) of 14 June 2019 adopted through Resolution No.10-OMI-213-DGMM.
 - d) Resolution MSC.445(99) of 24 May 2018 adopted through Resolution No.107-OMI-210-DGMM.
 - e) MMC-401
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1. Purpose

This Merchant Marine Circular is to inform about the adoption of the Code of Safety for Special Purpose Ships, as amended.

2. Scope

Special Purpose Ships as defined in the Code of Safety for Special Purpose Ships, of not less than 500 gross tonnage.

The Code of Safety for Special Purpose Ships 2008 (2008 SPS Code) entered into force for the Republic of Panamá since 1 April 2014.

3. Background

3.1. Through Resolution No. 106-OMI-126-DGMM of 1 April 2014 this Administration have adopted the SPS Code 2008 (Resolution MSC.266(84) as amended) and later on through the Resolution No. 106-OMI-148-DGMM of March 13, 2015 this Administration have adopted the SPS Code 1983 (Resolution A.534(13) as amended), considering the necessity of the industry to implement an international standard of safety for special purpose ships.



Merchant Marine Circular

3.2. The application of this Code will facilitate the operation of specialized types of ships with unusual design and operational characteristics that may differ from those of conventional merchant ships subject to the SOLAS Convention, since in virtue of the specialized nature of the work undertaken by these ships, special personnel are carried, who are neither crew members nor passengers as defined in the SOLAS Convention.

4. Definitions

4.1. "Special personnel" means all persons who are not passengers or members of the crew or children of under one year of age and who are carried on board in connection with the special purpose of that ship or because of special work being carried out aboard that ship. Wherever in this Code the number of special personnel appears as a parameter, it should include the number of passengers carried on board which may not exceed 12.

Special personnel are expected to be able bodied with a fair knowledge of the layout of the ship and to have received some training in safety procedures and the handling of the ship's safety equipment before leaving port and include the following:

- a. scientists, technicians and expeditionaries on ships engaged in research, non-commercial expeditions and survey;
- b. personnel engaging in training and practical marine experience to develop seafaring skills suitable for a professional career at sea. Such training should be in accordance with a training programme approved by the Administration;
- c. personnel who process the catch of fish, whales or other living resources of the sea on factory ships not engaged in catching;
- d. salvage personnel on salvage ships, cable-laying personnel on cable-laying ships, seismic personnel on seismic survey ships, diving personnel on diving support ships, pipe-laying personnel on pipe layers and crane operating personnel on floating cranes; and
- e. other personnel similar to those referred to in .1 to .4 who, in the opinion of the Administration, may be referred to this group.

4.2. "Special purpose ship" means a mechanically self-propelled ship which by reason of its function carries on board more than 12 special personnel.

Some sail training ships may be classified by the Administration as "not propelled by mechanical means" if fitted with mechanical propulsion for auxiliary and emergency purposes.



Merchant Marine Circular

Where a ship carries more than 12 passengers, as defined in SOLAS, the ship should not be considered a special purpose ship as it is a passenger ship as defined by SOLAS.

5. Applicability

- 5.1. Based on SPS Code 2008 paragraph 1.2.1, this Administration decided that the provisions of this Code will be applied as far as reasonable and practicable to special purpose ships less than 500 gross tonnage.
- 5.2. Considering also that **existing vessels** may not comply the requirements of SPS Code 2008 this Administration agreed that special purpose ships constructed before April 1, 2014 **but** after November 17 of 1983 will continue to apply the requirements of SPS Code 1983 and will make the appropriate arrangement to perform the required survey to certify the vessel during the next renewal survey of the statutory Certificates in order to comply as applicable with these requirements, in the meantime the current certificates issued to those vessels will remain valid until the appropriate inspection will be carried out.
- 5.3. In case of special purpose ships constructed before November 17, 1983, for which a Special Purpose Ships Safety Certificate has not been issued so far, this Administration will issue an appropriate statement of Acceptance in order to confirm that the ship is still doing the type of operations and carrying the numbers of personnel that the cargo ship safety certificate was issued for.
- 5.4. Notwithstanding the stated in paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 5 above, in case of ships constructed before April 1, 2014 operating within jurisdictional waters of a country which accepts the ship maintain the current SOLAS Certificates instead of the Special Purpose Ship Safety Certificate, this Administration will agree that it will not be issued with Special Purpose Ship Safety Certificate and will issue the appropriate statement of Acceptance in order to confirm that the ship is still doing the type of operations and carrying the numbers of personnel that the cargo ship safety certificate was issued for.
- 5.5. The Special Purpose Ships Code does not apply to ships meeting the Code for the Construction and Equipment of Mobile Offshore Drilling Units (MODU Code).
- 5.6. The Code is not intended for ships used to transport and accommodate industrial personnel that are not working on board. (refer to MMC-401).

6. **Special Purpose Ship Safety Certificate**

- 6.1. For facilitation the operation of special purpose ships, the Code provides for a certificate, called a Special Purpose Ship Safety Certificate, which should be



Merchant Marine Circular

issued to every special purpose ship. Where a special purpose ship is normally engaged on international voyages as defined in SOLAS it should, in addition, also carry SOLAS certificates, either:

1. for passenger ship with a SOLAS Exemption Certificate; or
2. for a cargo ship with a SOLAS Exemption Certificate, where necessary, as this flag Administration deems appropriate.

6.2. The duration and validity of the certificate should be governed by the respective provisions for cargo ships in SOLAS.

It is important to mention that according to the SPS Code when a ship which is not normally engaged as a special purpose ship and which undertakes an exceptional single voyage as a special purpose ship may be exempted by the Administration from the provisions of this Code, provided that it complies with safety requirements which in the opinion of the Administration are adequate for the voyage which is to be undertaken by the ship.

6.3. Form corresponding to the model of the Safety Certificate for Special Purpose Ships is given in the Annex to the SPS Code.

6.4. All Recognized Organizations duly approved to issue the certificates related to SOLAS Convention on behalf of the Republic of Panama, are authorized to issue a Special Purpose Ship Safety Certificate.

June, 2024 – Renumbered and new paragraphs added: 2, 4 5.5 and 5.6. References amended.

November, 2023 – New Paragraph 2, paragraph 1 was change and format was update

May, 2015 – Amendment to paragraphs 2, 4, 5, 6 and new paragraph 7 added, also SPS initials added to paragraph 11.

October, 2014 – New paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 added.

April, 2014.

Inquiries concerning the subject of this Merchant Marine Circular or any other request should be forward to:

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