

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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To the United States Maritime Industry:

Today the Coast Guard published the Final Rule (FR) entitled, "Implementation of the Amendments to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978 (STCW), as Amended, and Changes to National Endorsements." It is available in today's edition of the Federal Register at <https://www.federalregister.gov/>. This FR incorporates the 2010 Amendments to the STCW Convention into the U.S. regulations. It also makes other necessary changes to our national regulations for the purposes of reorganization, clarification and needed updates. The new regulations will be applicable to all mariners who begin service or training towards an endorsement, on or after March 24, 2014.

The FR sets out how a U.S. mariner may obtain an STCW endorsement and clarifies the requirements for each endorsement, including training, service, and assessments. Most of the new training requirements will not impact mariners holding existing STCW endorsements, but there are exceptions, such as training in leadership and managerial skills, that must be completed before January 1, 2017. Most of the remaining STCW requirements (including training, service, and assessments) will not be mandatory for existing mariners until on or after January 1, 2017.

Separate from training, service, and assessments, one important element that needs to be addressed immediately is the requirement to hold a medical certificate, especially for those mariners sailing internationally. In general, the Coast Guard will be changing its procedures and it will issue a separate medical certificate to certify a mariner's compliance with the minimum mariner medical standards. While the medical certificate issue is not a requirement for STCW until 2017, the International Labour Organization's Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) requires that mariners have a separate medical certificate issued by the flag administration. Therefore, since it will eventually be required under STCW, and since it is required now under the MLC, the Coast Guard is pressing forward to issue medical certificates as quickly as possible within the timing of this rule. One very important additional reason why the United States is eager to issue medical certificates to our mariners traveling internationally is that U.S. registered vessels that visit ports of nations that have adopted the MLC will be at risk of detention if they cannot demonstrate adequate compliance with the MLC. Therefore, effective January 2nd, 2014, the National Maritime Center (NMC) will begin issuing medical certificates to those mariners who hold STCW endorsements, and, on January 24, 2014, will begin to issue medical certificates to all mariners in the normal course of the application process. Please recognize that once you receive a medical certificate, it should be carried with your merchant mariner credential (MMC). Also, if you are a current holder of a valid STCW endorsement and you do not receive your medical certificate by March 31, 2014, we ask that you please contact the NMC at 1 888-I-ASK-NMC (1-888-427-5662).

Separate from STCW issues, the FR also revises the requirements for national endorsements. These regulatory revisions recognize changes in the maritime industry, and broaden service requirements to assist officers obtaining endorsements. Examples include the lowering of the minimum tonnage and expanding the acceptance of towing service towards unlimited deck endorsements. Additionally, the FR consolidates similar endorsements, reducing the total number of national endorsements that must be managed as well as streamlining qualification requirements. This includes the consolidation of the chief engineer (limited oceans) and chief engineer (limited near coastal) endorsements into a single chief engineer limited endorsement. The FR also sets out the requirements to obtain a master of towing vessel endorsement for those mariners with previous towing experience, so, for example, those mariners who were not formerly required to hold an endorsement to tow in support of the oil and mineral industry, may seek one. Further, and as noted above, the medical certificate issue is also applicable to national endorsements. The FR separates the medical certification from the MMC and establishes a medical certificate as evidence of meeting the minimum mariner medical qualifications. The medical certificate must be carried when acting under the authority of a credential once it has been issued to a mariner.

For a mariner's STCW endorsements, the changes will be transitioned by January 1, 2017. For a mariner's national endorsements the changes will be transitioned over a 5 year period, ending on March 23, 2019. During the transition period, a current mariner need only meet the requirements in effect before March 24, 2014, except for certain STCW training requirements. The opportunity to use the requirements in effect before March 24, 2014, will only be available for one transaction during the STCW or national transition period. A mariner has the option to choose to be evaluated under the new requirements when those requirements are to the mariner's benefit. The National Maritime Center is prepared to implement the new standards, and applying under the new rule will likely save you time. For those mariners holding endorsements no longer issued under the new rule, they may either keep their current endorsement or it can be transitioned to one of the consolidated endorsements. In some instances there may be additional training or examination for the consolidated endorsements.

We will be publishing a number of policy documents, in the form of Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circulars (NVICs), to assist with the implementation of this FR. I hope that all NVICs will be published within 90 days of the FR publication. The NVICs will be posted to the USCG website, at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/nvic/>. We will announce the NVIC releases in the U.S. Federal Register (<https://www.federalregister.gov/>), as well as through the NMC listserv. You should also consult the NMC's website (<http://www.uscg.mil/nmc/>) to obtain the latest policy updates when preparing to apply for an endorsement.

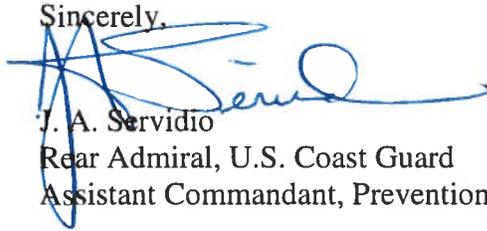
The Coast Guard will also hold several meetings on this FR. Details regarding these meetings will be announced through the NMC website and the Federal Register in the near future. The first meeting will be held in January and will be conducted in a webinar (online) format. The first meeting, where the public will be able to attend, will take place in February in Washington, DC. During these meetings we will pass the latest information on the rule as well as provide an opportunity for you to ask questions. An email address, STCWAsk@uscg.mil, has been set up to receive questions on the FR. Questions sent to this address will be reviewed and may be added to NMC's website, under a frequently asked questions (FAQ) section. We will continue to

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update the FAQ page to ensure maximum visibility on issues impacting the implementation of the FR.

I recognize that many mariners are anxious about the impact of these regulations. I completely understand this anxiety and my staff and I will do everything we can to ensure a smooth transition over the coming months and years. I plan to attend the meeting in January and look forward to receiving your comments and questions at that time.

Sincerely,



J. A. Servidio

Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard

Assistant Commandant, Prevention Policy (CG-5P)