

COMMENTARY ON CHAPTER VIII:

WATCH KEEPING

Chapter VIII of the STCW Annex, and the associated sections of the STCW Code, are a consolidation of material relating to watchkeeping arrangements. The primary focus of the STCW convention is to ensure that an effective watch is maintained on all seagoing ships, by qualified and fit personnel under all circumstances.

Regulation VIII/1 - Fitness for Duty

The first regulation in Chapter VIII requires flag States to establish and enforce rest periods for watchkeeping personnel, and to require that watch systems are so arranged that watchkeeping personnel are not impaired by fatigue.

Section A-VIII/1 of the STCW Code states that watchkeeping personnel (i.e., all persons assigned duty as officers in charge of a watch, or as rating forming part of a watch) shall be provided a minimum of 10 hours of rest in any 24-hour period. The period of rest may be divided into two periods, one of which must be at least 6 hours. Also, the watch schedule is to be posted where it is easily accessible.

The basic rest-period rule of section A/VIII/1 applies except in an emergency or a drill or "in other overriding operational conditions." Furthermore, the 10 hours of rest may be reduced to a single period of 6 hours for up to two days, as long as the seafarer concerned is provided with at least 70 hours of rest each seven day period.

Section B-VIII/1 of the STCW Code (which contains non-mandatory guidance) explains that the term "overriding operational conditions" should be "construed to mean only essential shipboard work which cannot be delayed for safety or environmental reasons or which could not reasonably have been anticipated at the commencement of the voyage.

Although mathematically, 10 hours of rest leaves 14 hours for shipboard activities, Section B-VIII/1 of the STCW Code states that the minimum rest periods "should not be interpreted as implying that all other hours may be devoted to watchkeeping or other duties."

Regulation VIII/2 - Certification of Seafarers

This regulation requires flag States to direct the attention of companies, masters, chief engineer officers, and all watchkeeping personnel to the watchkeeping requirements and guidelines set out in the STCW Code.* Flag States also must require the master of every seagoing ship to ensure that watchkeeping arrangements are adequate for maintaining a safe

(*NOTE: At the time of writing, consideration is being given at IMO to a new Safe Navigation and Watchkeeping (SNW) Code which would be a practical code for shipboard use, and, for ease of reference, would incorporate the text of the watchkeeping provisions of Section A-VIII/2 of the STCW Code. This SNW Code is being considered in the context of revisions to Chapter V of the SOLAS Convention.) watch or watches (i.e., navigational watch, radio watch and engineering watch).

The watchkeeping arrangements and principles in Section AVIII/2 of the STCW Code are organized in 4 Parts:

Part 1 concerns certification: officers in charge of the navigational and engineering watch must be qualified in accordance with Chapters II or III (or Chapter VII) as appropriate.

Part 2 requires that a voyage plan be prepared before the commencement of each voyage.

Part 3 discusses in detail the principles to be applied in maintaining watch at sea. Part 3-1 concerns the navigational watch. Special emphasis is placed on the lookout responsibilities. The associated guidance in section B-VIII/3-1 suggest the importance of understanding the principles of bridge resource management in continuously evaluating the need for adjusting watch arrangements. Part 3-2 concerns the engineering watch. Part 3-3 focuses on the radio watch responsibilities.

Part 4 concerns watchkeeping in port.

This concludes the survey of and commentary on the substance of the STCW convention