



Key Issues

Perfecting Garbage Management

While the vast majority of garbage found at sea originates from land, the provisions of Annex V of the MARPOL Convention mean it is no longer permitted for any merchant ship to dispose of garbage at sea because of the damaging effects on the marine environment. The generation of garbage must be minimised, recycling should be undertaken as a matter of course, and discharge to port reception facilities must be the norm.

In 2018, ICS will be publishing a new edition of its Guidance for the Preparation and Implementation of Garbage Management Plans. This revised guidance will be timely as new attention is given to the negative impacts of plastics on the health of the world's oceans. This has been given new impetus by the widely acclaimed BBC documentary series 'Blue Planet', and the high level UN Ocean Conference, which was held in New York in June 2017, at which ICS represented the global shipping industry.

The revised ICS Guidance is intended to provide those with responsibility for developing mandatory Garbage Management Plans with a better understanding of the intentions behind the IMO MARPOL requirements, to enable effective implementation and full compliance.

Garbage dumped at sea can actually be as harmful as oil or chemicals. Plastics in particular can take years to degrade, and fish and other marine life can easily confuse plastics with food. As well as doing great harm to marine life and threatening biodiversity, dangerous toxins can enter the food chain, ultimately being consumed by humans.

Any incident involving the illegal dumping of garbage may result in criminal convictions and heavy fines. This in turn may severely damage a company's reputation and impact its commercial performance. Ignorance of the regulations is no defence. If a ship and its crew are seen to pose a risk of marine pollution, the vessel can be detained by Port State Control until any deficiencies are corrected.

Modern products commonly use materials, like plastic, which persist in the marine environment and therefore require special processing before disposal on shore. An essential feature, therefore, of the current IMO MARPOL regime is the requirement for ships to prepare and implement Garbage Management Plans.

The new edition of the ICS Guidance updates advice on best practice in line with the most recent changes to MARPOL Annex V. These increased the application of the regulations, expanding their scope by broadening the definition of what constitutes garbage and introducing a general prohibition of its discharge into the sea.

It is a fundamental requirement of MARPOL that IMO Member States should provide adequate facilities for the reception of waste from ships calling at their ports and terminals. However, the quality and availability of reception facilities worldwide is inconsistent. Indeed some developed countries actually provide poorer facilities than their developing nation counterparts, or offer services based on varying tariff structures which often do not encourage their use.

The provision of reception facilities and the extent to which ships use them are both factors influenced by cost. Many ports which have installed reception facilities find their facilities ignored in favour of ports which provide them at more favourable rates.

The new ICS Guidelines therefore emphasise the important need for ships to report inadequate reception facilities to their flag administration so that reports can be communicated to IMO.

