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Guidelines on the Application of the

IMO International Safety Management (ISM) Code

Fully Revised Fifth Edition

The International Safety Management (ISM) Code is a key mandatory requirement for merchant ships, critical to the improvement of maritime safety and environmental performance.

The new fifth edition of these ICS Guidelines includes comprehensive advice on compliance with the ISM Code for anyone involved with developing, implementing and maintaining Safety Management Systems (SMS), which are critical to successful and efficient ship operations.

This includes shipping company executives, Designated Persons Ashore (DPAs) and Masters and all other personnel – shipboard and shore-based – with responsibility for ISM related compliance; plus other stakeholders such as flag Administrations, external auditors and training institutions.

This new edition has been completely rewritten to provide additional detailed advice on the elements of an effective SMS, taking advantage of experience gained over the past 20 years since compliance with the ISM Code became mandatory. This includes:

- Objectives of the ISM Code and an SMS, clearly explaining what and who is involved in continuous SMS improvement;
- Elements of an effective SMS, clearly explaining the functional requirements of an SMS and how these can be addressed;
- Techniques and tools for improving the SMS beyond mandatory requirements;
- Commentary on the use of modern technology, in the face of the increasing complexity of modern ship operations and regulatory developments, with an emphasis on approaches to keep the SMS and its documentation as simple as possible.



The fifth edition replaces the fourth (2010) edition. It is strongly recommended that a copy is kept in every shipping company office and carried on board every ship worldwide.