Saint Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority

DIVISION OF MARITIME AFFAIRS (DMA)

"FOR CLEANER SEAS AND SAFER OCEANS"

International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974

Adoption: 1 November 1974
Entry into force: 25 May 1980

Introduction and History

The SOLAS Convention in its successive forms is generally regarded as the most important of all international treaties concerning the safety of merchant ships. The first version was adopted in 1914, in response to the Titanic disaster, the second in 1929, the third in 1948, and the fourth in 1960.

The 1960 Convention - which was adopted on 17 June 1960 and entered into force on 26 May 1965 - was the first major task for IMO after the Organization's creation and it represented a considerable step forward in modernizing regulations and in keeping pace with technical developments in the shipping industry.

As a result the 1974 Convention has been updated and amended on numerous occasions. The Convention in force today is sometimes referred to as SOLAS, 1974, as amended.

Technical Provisions

The main objective of the SOLAS Convention is to specify minimum standards for the construction, equipment and operation of ships, compatible with their safety. Flag States are responsible for ensuring that ships under their flag comply with its requirements, and a number of certificates are prescribed in the Convention as proof that this has been done. Control provisions also allow Contracting Governments to inspect ships of other Contracting States if there are clear grounds for believing that the ship and its equipment do not substantially comply with the requirements of the Convention - this procedure is known as port State control. The current SOLAS Convention includes Articles setting out general obligations, amendment procedure and so on, followed by an Annex divided into 12 Chapters.

General Provisions

Includes regulations concerning the survey of the various types of ships and the issuing of documents signifying that the ship meets the requirements of the Convention. It also includes provisions for the control of ships in ports of other Contracting Governments.

International Convention on Load Lines, 1966

Adoption: 5 April 1966
Entry into force: 21 July 1968

Introduction and History

It has long been recognized that limitations on the draught to which a ship may be loaded make a significant contribution to her safety. These limits are given in the form of freeboards, which constitute, besides external weather tight and watertight integrity, the main objective of the Convention.

The first International Convention on Load Lines, adopted in 1930, was based on the principle of reserve buoyancy, although it was recognized then that the freeboard should also ensure adequate stability and avoid excessive stress on the ship's hull as a result of overloading.

In the 1966 Load Lines convention, adopted by IMO, provisions are made determining the freeboard of ships by subdivision and damage stability calculations.

The regulations take into account the potential hazards present in different zones and different seasons. The technical annex contains several additional safety measures concerning doors, freeing ports, hatchways and other items. The main purpose of these measures is to ensure the watertight integrity of ships' hulls below the freeboard deck.

All assigned load lines must be marked amidships on each side of the ship, together with the deck line. Ships intended for the carriage of timber deck cargo are assigned a smaller freeboard as the deck cargo provides protection against the impact of waves.

International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978

Adoption: 7 July 1978 Entry into force: 28 April 1984

The 1995 amendments, which entered into force on 1 February 1997, completely revised and replaced the Convention. However, until 1 February 2002, Parties may continue to issue, recognize and endorse certificates which applied before 1 February 1997 in respect of seafarers who began training or seagoing service before 1 August 1998. This means that the original 1978text will continue to apply to many of the world's ships and seafarers until the year 2002.

The 1978 STCW Convention was the first to establish basic requirements on training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers on an international level. Previously the standards of training, certification and watchkeeping of officers and ratings were established by individual governments, usually without reference to practices in other countries. As a result standards and procedures varied widely, even though shipping is the most international of all industries.

The Convention prescribes minimum standards relating to training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers which countries are obliged to meet or exceed. The Convention did not deal with manning levels: IMO provisions in this area are covered by regulation 13 of Chapter V of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974, whose requirements are backed up by resolution A.890(21) Principles of safe manning, adopted by the IMO Assembly in 1999, which replaced an earlier resolution A.481(XII) adopted in 1981.

The Articles of the Convention include requirements relating to issues surrounding certification and port State control.

One especially important feature of the Convention is that it applies to ships of non-party States when visiting ports of States which are Parties to the Convention. Article X requires Parties to apply the control measures to ships of all flags to the extent necessary to ensure that no more favourable treatment is given to ships entitled to fly the flag of a State which is not a Party than is given to ships entitled to fly the flag of a State that is a Party.

The difficulties which could arise for ships of States which are not Parties to the Convention is one reason why the Convention has received such wide acceptance. By November 1999, the STCW Convention had 133 Parties, representing 98.11 percent of world shipping tonnage.

International Convention on Tonnage Measurement of Ships, 1969

Adoption: 23 June 1969
Entry into force: 18 July 1982

Introduction

The Convention, adopted by IMO in 1969, was the first successful attempt to introduce a universal tonnage measurement system.

Previously, various systems were used to calculate the tonnage of merchant ships. Although all went back to the method devised by George Moorsom of the British Board of Trade in 1854, there were considerable differences between them and it was recognized that there was a great need for one single international system.

The Convention provides for gross and net tonnages, both of which are calculated independently.

The rules apply to all ships built on or after 18 July 1982 - the date of entry into force - while ships built before that date were allowed to retain their existing tonnage for 12 years after entry into force, or until 18 July 1994.

This phase-in period was intended to ensure that ships were given reasonable economic safeguards, since port and other dues are charged according to ship tonnage. At the same time, and as far as possible, the Convention was drafted to ensure that gross and net tonnages calculated under the new system did not differ too greatly from those calculated under previous methods.

Gross tons and net tons

The Convention meant a transition from the traditionally used terms gross register tons (grt) and net register tons (nrt) to gross tons (GT) and net tons (NT).

Gross tonnage forms the basis for manning regulations, safety rules and registration fees. Both gross and net tonnages are used to calculate port dues.

The gross tonnage is a function of the moulded volume of all enclosed spaces of the ship. The net tonnage is produced by a formula which is a function of the moulded volume of all cargo spaces of the ship. The net tonnage shall not be taken as less than 30 per cent of the gross tonnage