

National Maritime Occupational
Health and Safety Committee



GUIDELINES TO SHIPPING COMPANIES ON SHIPBOARD SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES AND SAFETY COMMITTEES

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	3
2	Shipboard Safety Representatives	4
	2.1 Processes for selecting shipboard safety representatives	
	2.2 The role of shipboard safety representatives	
	2.3 Training for safety representatives	
	2.4 Consultation	
3	Shipboard Safety Committees	8
	3.1 Why shipboard safety committees are important	
	3.2 Who should attend meetings	
	3.3 How frequently safety committees should meet	
	3.4 The role of the shipboard safety committees	
4	Ensuring that matters raised by safety representatives are taken seriously	11



1

INTRODUCTION

The parties to the National Maritime Occupational Health and Safety Committee (NMOHSC), namely the UK Chamber of Shipping, Nautilus International and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), consider that shipboard safety representatives and safety committees have an important role to play in reducing accidents on board ships and promoting supportive safety cultures. Companies are required by international law to establish shipboard safety committees and provide for safety representatives on any ship where there are at least five crew members.

These guidelines aim to promote the health, safety and welfare of seafarers. They also aim to demonstrate that such committees will function most effectively where shipboard safety representatives are provided with appropriate training, sufficient time off to perform their tasks, the authority to raise safety concerns and take part in incident investigations and where effective two-way channels of communication with senior personnel on board and ashore are in place.

Many flag state authorities have enacted laws to regulate the processes for choosing shipboard safety representatives and the powers that they must be given. These guidelines do not replace such laws and should be read in conjunction with any flag state laws and guidance relating to shipboard safety committees and representatives. In the event of any conflict between provisions of these guidelines and applicable national laws, the latter shall prevail.

Everybody on board ship has a role to play in safety. The Master has overall responsibility, whilst the officers have safety duties and training as specified under international conventions. However, all members of the crew and others working on board are required to take care of their own safety and that of others on board. Becoming a shipboard safety representative and a member of a shipboard safety committee enables any member of the crew to play an active part in incident prevention and reduction as well as the promotion of an effective safety culture. A company that engages effectively with shipboard safety representatives and committees and responds to safety concerns raised by them will foster greater awareness and ownership of safety issues by their crews.

2

SHIPBOARD SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES

2.1 Processes for selecting shipboard safety representatives

Any seafarer of any rank who wishes to become a shipboard safety representative should be encouraged to put themselves forward, but no seafarer should feel coerced into doing so.

Shipboard safety representatives may be elected by their fellow crew members, or appointed by the company. The company should decide on the procedure, as appropriate to the number of crew members on board and the crew rotation pattern, following consultation with the representatives of the seafarers.

Where nominations for election as shipboard safety representative are sought, such should be communicated to all crew members, including those who are on voyage leave. Company procedures should determine:

- The number of proposers, if any, required by any person being nominated for election
- The time period within which nominations should be received
- Any qualifying period of prior sea service with the company required of persons being nominated
- The maximum period of service as a shipboard safety representative and whether this is renewable (by election or appointment).

A company may restrict nominations to those working in a particular department or departments on board, where this is necessary to ensure that as many departments as desired are represented by shipboard safety representatives and on the shipboard safety committee.

Voting should be by secret ballot. All crew members should be given an opportunity to vote.

Where only one nomination is received for a position, the nominee may be elected unopposed. Where no nominations are received, the company should consult with crew members and their representatives with a view to appointing a shipboard safety representative.

There should be a sufficient number of shipboard safety representatives to provide for effective representation of all departments.

2.2 The role of shipboard safety representatives

Shipboard safety representatives should be provided with authority;

- (a) to notify management of potential hazards and dangerous occurrences at the workplace (whether or not they are drawn to their attention by the employees they represent) and to examine the causes of accidents at the workplace;
- (b) to notify management of any complaints raised by any employee they represent relating to that employee's health, safety or welfare at work;
- (c) to make representations to the company on matters arising out of sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) above;
- (d) to make representations to the company on general matters affecting the health, safety or welfare at work of the employees at the workplace;
- (e) to carry out inspections;
- (f) to represent employees in consultations with inspectors of the appropriate enforcing authority;
- (g) to receive safety information from management; and
- (h) to attend meetings of safety committees where they attend in their capacity as a safety representative in connection with any of the above functions;
- (i) to undertake safety-related tasks delegated to them by management;
- (j) to facilitate the communication of safety messages from management to the crew members they represent;
- (k) to report back to the crew members they represent on discussions and outcomes of meetings of the shipboard safety committee.

Safety representatives should be encouraged to engage in regular dialogue with their fellow crew members and encourage them to speak up with regard to any safety and health related concerns that they may have.

2.3 Training for safety representatives

Who should provide it

The company should ensure that shipboard safety representatives receive training appropriate to the role. It may provide the training itself, or make use of an external provider. The trade unions may also provide training courses. Training may be delivered remotely, on board ship and/or ashore as appropriate. Shipboard safety representatives should be allowed to take time off from their normal duties for the purpose of training, as well as study leave prior to any examinations that might be integral to the training.

Length and content of training

The training should be of a length sufficient to provide shipboard safety representatives with a working knowledge of at least the matters falling within their authority as set out Section 2.2. It should be specifically focused on shipboard work, since generic training that has been designed for shore-based work is unlikely to be of as much value.

Training should also include information on:

- The company's reporting procedures;
- Any company statements on safety culture and commitment to safety.

Refresher training

The company may wish to consider offering refresher training to shipboard safety representatives at regular intervals. Should a shipboard safety representative wish to receive further training on any specific safety-related issue, the company should discuss this with the shipboard safety representative and aim to provide or facilitate appropriate training. Any training that is relevant to the role of shipboard safety representative should be funded by the company.

2.4 Consultation

It is important that shipboard safety representatives are consulted in advance and in good time by the company on all matters relating to their health and safety.

The company should empower shipboard safety representatives to make representations about health and safety. Any new safety measures that are agreed should be put in place as soon as reasonable and practicable.

Workers or their elected representatives shall be given access by the employer and, where applicable, by the Company, to information about;

- health and safety matters from inspection agencies and health and safety authorities; and
- every accident involving death, major or serious injury and every dangerous occurrence.



Photo credit: Red Funnel Group

3

SHIPBOARD SAFETY COMMITTEES

3.1 Why shipboard safety committees are important

The purpose and objective of a safety committee should be to ensure that the company informs and consults with its shipboard staff at all levels on its health and safety policies, programmes and procedures and acts upon concerns that might be raised in respect of these, as well as the working environment onboard. A well-functioning shipboard safety committee is essential for the development of an effective safety culture, as it facilitates direct two-way communication of safety messages from the top down and reports of safety practices and concerns from the bottom up.

Shipboard safety committees should ensure that there is an appropriate response to any safety incident and enable wide participation in investigations of health and safety incidents. They should also take a proactive role in preventing such incidents, by encouraging safe behaviours, promoting the use of safety observations and identifying unsafe acts and conditions.

3.2 Who should attend meetings

The shipboard safety committee should include the Master and/or a person designated by the Master to take specific responsibility for the health and safety of the crew, along with the shipboard safety representatives. As far as possible, the entire crew at all levels should have effective representation.

Companies should consider adopting a procedure whereby a member of senior shore-based management engages with the committee. This may be done remotely if their presence on board for a meeting is not practicable. This would enable safety messages and concerns to be communicated directly, whilst also demonstrating to the crew on board the commitment of the company's leadership team to their health, safety and welfare. However it is not recommended that senior shore-based management attend the entirety of any meeting, in order not to risk inhibiting discussion and the raising of safety concerns.

3.3 How frequently safety committees should meet

Meetings should take place regularly, taking into account the pattern of operation of the ship and crew rotations. In addition to the scheduled meetings, the Master or person designated by the Master should also convene meetings when requested to do so by a shipboard safety representative, for the purpose of addressing a particular issue. Meetings should also be convened after serious accidents or incidents, as part of the company's investigation and reporting procedures.

Minutes of the meetings should be taken, showing all agreed action points and the name of the person who has taken responsibility for fulfilment of each action point. The minutes should be distributed to the members of the committee and the company and made available to those working on board.



Photo credit: The Denholm Group

3.4 The role of the shipboard safety committees

The functions of the shipboard safety committee should include:

- cooperating with the Master and the company in the implementation of the company's occupational safety and health policy and programme;
- providing seafarers with a forum to make suggestions for improving the company's health and safety policies and procedures;
- taking part in the planning, managing and coordinating of safe and healthy working conditions on board. The committee should take preventive measures important to the health and safety of seafarers, including the mental wellbeing, and provide advice to resolve safety and health problems;
- reporting on and monitoring the company's safety performance and statistics;
- taking part in the investigation, identification and analysis of occupational accidents, injuries and diseases;
- proposing and taking part in the implementation of measures to prevent any recurrence, in consultation with the Master;
- keeping up to date with provisions for the protection of seafarers;
- contributing to defining principles for appropriate and necessary training and instructions specific to on-board working conditions;
- continuously verifying the observance of safety procedures and safe behaviours;
- making representations and recommendations on behalf of the crew through the Master to the shipowner;
- discussing and taking appropriate action in respect of any health and safety issue affecting the crew;
- evaluating appropriate protective and safety equipment, including life-saving equipment;
- drawing up measures aimed at ensuring that there is continuous improvement.

4**ENSURING THAT MATTERS RAISED BY SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES ARE TAKEN SERIOUSLY**

The company should take careful note of all health and safety concerns raised by shipboard safety representatives and safety committees. It should provide a response to all concerns in a timely manner, setting out its reasons for any decision it might take to act, or refrain from acting. When responding, the company should make clear that it will engage in further discussion with the shipboard safety representatives and safety committees on the matter raised, with the aim of resolving any differences of view, or monitoring the functioning of any new safety procedures or equipment that might be introduced as a result of the concern raised.

Sources of further information

Guidance in Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers (CoSWP)
The Stationery Office, ISBN: 9780115541322

Guidelines for implementing the occupational safety and health provisions
of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 International Labour Office,
ISBN: 978-92-2-129497-9 (Web pdf)

NMOHSC Guidelines to Shipping Companies on Behavioural Safety Systems

