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Circular Letter No.4260/Add.1
16 June 2020

To: All IMO Members
Intergovernmental organizations
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status

Subject: **Communication from the Republic of Finland**

The Government of the Republic of Finland has sent the attached communication, dated 10 June 2020, with the request that it be circulated by the Organization.

10 June 2020

To: His Excellency Kitack Lim
Secretary-General
International Maritime Organization
4 Albert Embankment
SE1 7SR London
United Kingdom

Subject: Extension of the validity of maritime personnel certificates during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

Excellency,

With reference to the Circular Letter 4260 regarding extension of the validity of maritime personnel certificates during COVID-19 outbreak, I would like to further update you on the measures taken by Finland.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, appropriate and necessary changes have been made in current legislation on a temporary basis. Please find attached the information bulletin of the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (Traficom) regarding the renewal of competency and medical certificates during the coronavirus pandemic. The validity of certain seafarers' certificates have been extended. Traficom may also, when justified by an overriding reason, issue dispensations to seafarers regarding Certificates of Proficiency and permit seafarers to continue serving on board without a valid medical certificate on the basis of an application.

In addition, certain other amendments have been made to ensure smooth goods and freight transport services. The amendments to Act on the Security of Certain Ships and Associated Port Facilities and on Monitoring Maritime Security (485/2004) will allow Traficom to authorise a classification society to carry out ship security verifications and to issue International Ship Security Certificates. These verifications are carried out on Finnish vessels that are abroad. An amendment to the Register of Ships Act (404/2020), provides a possibility to present a copy of a ship's document of title in digital form instead of presenting the original document in print. The amendments will remain in force until 31 December 2020.

I would appreciate if you could circulate the measures developed by Finland to the attention of the Member States and any interested parties.

Yours sincerely,



Mikael Nyberg
Alternate Permanent Representative of Finland to the IMO

Attachments

1. Information bulletin of the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (Traficom) regarding the renewal of competency and medical certificates during the coronavirus pandemic

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Information bulletin for seafarers and shipping companies: Renewal of competency and medical certificates during the coronavirus pandemic – Updated May 2020

The coronavirus pandemic affects ships' crew changes as well as the organisation of seafarers' training courses or refresher training courses, which may in turn have an impact on the renewal of competency and medical certificates. The Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (Traficom) has decided to extend the validity of certain seafarers' certificates and may, when justified by an overriding reason, permit seafarers to continue serving on board without a valid medical certificate on the basis of an application.

The coronavirus pandemic presents substantial challenges for international travel, making crew changes difficult or impossible. Restrictions on gatherings are preventing the organisation of seafarers' training courses and refresher courses. As the pandemic continues, seafarers working on ships will find themselves unable to renew their competency certificates. Seafarers' medical certificates may also expire during this time.

Renewal of seafarers' medical certificates

Under section 10 of the Act on Medical Fitness Examinations of Seafarers (1171/2010), the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency may, for compelling reasons, grant a seafarer a permit to temporarily serve on board without a valid medical certificate, if the medical certificate has recently expired. Such a permit is valid until the next port of call where an examination can be performed, but no longer than three months. In such cases, the shipowner must contact the team responsible for maritime qualifications at [merimiesyksikko\(at\)traficom.fi](mailto:merimiesyksikko(at)traficom.fi). Please note that this only applies to vessels flying the flag of Finland. In other cases, the shipowner should contact the flag State in question.

Extension of the validity of maritime certificates of competency or proficiency beyond their expiry date

Traficom issues the Finnish Certificates of Competency, Certificates of Proficiency and Endorsements attesting the recognition of foreign certificates on the basis of the STCW Convention. Traficom also issues dispensations in accordance with article VIII of the Convention.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, appropriate and necessary changes have been made in current legislation on a temporary basis by Act 407/2020. By virtue of this Act, Finnish Certificates of Competency and Certificates of Proficiency whose expiration date falls between 16 March and 31 October 2020 are granted a general temporary extension of validity of up to 6 months. Seafarers will not be required to submit an application.

Dispensations

Traficom has been temporarily authorised in circumstances of exceptional necessity to issue dispensations to seafarers regarding Certificates of Proficiency, if this does not put life, property or the environment at risk. The shipowner must apply for the dispensation and declare the circumstances of exceptional necessity.

Endorsements attesting recognition

Traficom issues Endorsements attesting the recognition for CoCs according to STCW Regulation I/2.7, Regulation I/10 and Section A-I/2.4 of the STCW Code.

If an Endorsement attesting recognition is about to expire during the voyage, seafarers must submit an application for a new Endorsement. The application may be sent electronically.

Updates

As the coronavirus situation is constantly evolving, it may be necessary in the future to issue new guidelines with regard to seafarers' competency and proficiency matters. Traficom will update these instructions as the situation develops and make the necessary decisions in accordance with the relevant legislation. Traficom is also actively monitoring international guidelines related to this matter.

Enquiries:

By email to [merimiesyksikko\(at\)traficom.fi](mailto:merimiesyksikko(at)traficom.fi)
