

POLAR Code

International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters

2016 Edition

Supplement

January 2026

The following amendments to the International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code) were adopted by the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) at its 107th session by resolution MSC.538(107) and enter into force on 1 January 2026.

Resolution MSC.538(107) *adopted on 8 June 2023*

Part I-A – Safety measures

Chapter 9 *Safety of navigation*

1 *The heading of chapter 9 is replaced by the following:*

“Chapter 9
*Safety of navigation for ships certified
in accordance with SOLAS chapter I”*

2 *The following text is inserted after the heading of chapter 9:*

“This chapter applies to ships certified in accordance with SOLAS chapter I.”

3 The following new chapter is inserted after existing chapter 9:

“Chapter 9-1

Safety of navigation for fishing vessels of 24 metres in length overall and above, pleasure yachts of 300 gross tonnage and upwards not engaged in trade and cargo ships of 300 gross tonnage and upwards but below 500 gross tonnage

This chapter applies to:

- .1 fishing vessels of 24 metres in length overall and above;
- .2 pleasure yachts of 300 gross tonnage and upwards not engaged in trade; and
- .3 cargo ships of 300 gross tonnage and upwards but below 500 gross tonnage.

9-1.1 Goal

The goal of this chapter is to provide for safe navigation.

9-1.2 Functional requirements

In order to achieve the goal set out in paragraph 9-1.1 above, the following functional requirements are embodied in the regulations of this chapter.

9-1.2.1 Nautical information

Ships shall have the ability to receive up-to-date information including ice information for safe navigation.

9-1.2.2 Navigational equipment functionality

- .1 The navigational equipment and systems shall be designed, constructed and installed to retain their functionality under the expected environmental conditions in the area of operation.
- .2 Systems for providing reference headings and position fixing shall be suitable for the intended areas.

9-1.2.3 Additional navigational equipment

Ships shall have the ability to visually detect ice when operating in darkness.

9-1.3 Regulations

9-1.3.1 Nautical information

In order to comply with the functional requirement of paragraph 9-1.2.1 above, ships shall have means of receiving and displaying current information on ice conditions in the area of operation.

9-1.3.2 Navigational equipment functionality

9-1.3.2.1 In order to comply with the functional requirement of paragraph 9-1.2.2.1 above, the following applies:

- .1 ice-strengthened ships constructed on or after 1 January 2026 shall have either two independent echo-sounding devices or one echo-sounding device with two separate independent transducers. Other devices capable of depth sounding, such as fish finders, acceptable to the Administration, may be used as equivalent means of meeting this requirement;
- .2 ships shall comply with SOLAS regulation V/22.1.9.4, irrespective of the date of construction and the size, and have a clear view astern. On ships which cannot comply with these requirements, arrangements acceptable to the Administration shall be provided to achieve a level of visibility that is equivalent to these requirements;
- .3 for ships operating in areas, and during periods, where ice accretion is likely to occur, means to prevent the accumulation of ice on antennas required for navigation and communication shall be provided; and
- .4 in addition, for ice-strengthened ships, the following applies:
 - .1 where equipment required by SOLAS chapter V or this chapter have sensors that project below the hull, such sensors shall be protected against ice; and

- .2 in category A and B ships constructed on or after 1 January 2026, the bridge wings shall be enclosed or designed to protect navigational equipment and operating personnel. On ships which cannot comply with this regulation, arrangements acceptable to the Administration shall be provided to achieve a level of protection that is equivalent to this regulation.

9-1.3.2.2 In order to comply with the functional requirement of paragraph 9-1.2.2.2 above, the following applies:

- .1 ships of 500 gross tonnage and upwards shall have two non-magnetic means to determine and display their heading. Both means shall be independent and shall be connected to the ship's main and emergency source of power; and
- .2 ships proceeding to latitudes over 80 degrees shall be fitted with at least one GNSS compass or equivalent, which shall be connected to the ship's main and emergency source of power.

9-1.3.3 Additional navigational equipment

In order to comply with the functional requirement of paragraph 9-1.2.3, ships, with the exception of those solely operating in areas with 24 hours daylight, shall be equipped with two means of illumination to aid visual detection of ice."

Chapter 11

Voyage planning

4 *The heading of chapter 11 is replaced by the following:*

"Chapter 11

Voyage planning for ships certified

in accordance with SOLAS chapter I"

5 *The following text is inserted after the heading of chapter 11:*

“This chapter applies to ships certified in accordance with SOLAS chapter I.”

6 *The following new chapter is inserted after existing chapter 11, together with the associated footnotes:*

“Chapter 11-1

Voyage planning for fishing vessels of 24 metres in length overall and above, pleasure yachts of 300 gross tonnage and upwards not engaged in trade and cargo ships of 300 gross tonnage and upwards but below 500 gross tonnage

This chapter applies to the following ships operating in polar waters:

- .1 fishing vessels of 24 metres in length overall and above;
- .2 pleasure yachts of 300 gross tonnage and upwards not engaged in trade; and
- .3 cargo ships of 300 gross tonnage and upwards but below 500 gross tonnage.

11-1.1 Goal

The goal of this chapter is to ensure that the company, master and crew are provided with sufficient information to enable operations to be conducted with due consideration to safety of ship and persons on board and, as appropriate, environmental protection.

11-1.2 Functional requirement

In order to achieve the goal set out in paragraph 11-1.1 above, the voyage plan shall take into account the potential hazards of the intended voyage.

11-1.3 Requirements

In order to comply with the functional requirement of paragraph 11-1.2 above, the master shall consider a route through polar waters, taking into account the following:

- .1 the procedures required by the safety management system on board; if no safety management system is implemented there shall be a documented procedure for operation in polar waters;
- .2 any limitations of the hydrographic information and aids to navigation available;
- .3 current information on the extent and type of ice and icebergs in the vicinity of the intended route;
- .4 statistical information on ice and temperatures from former years;
- .5 places of refuge;
- .6 current information and measures to be taken when marine mammals are encountered relating to known areas with densities of marine mammals, including seasonal migration areas;¹
- .7 current information on relevant ships' routing systems, speed recommendations and vessel traffic services relating to known areas with densities of marine mammals, including seasonal migration areas;¹
- .8 national and international designated protected areas along the route; and
- .9 operation in areas remote from search and rescue (SAR) capabilities.²

¹ Refer to *Guidance document for minimizing the risk of ship strikes with cetaceans* (MEPC/Circ.674).

² Refer to *Enhanced contingency planning guidance for passenger ships operating in areas remote from SAR facilities* (MSC.1/Circ.1184) and *Guidelines on voyage planning for passenger ships operating in remote areas* (resolution A.999(25))."

Part I-B – Additional guidance regarding the provisions of the Introduction and Part I-A

**10 Additional guidance to chapter 9
(Safety of navigation)**

7 *The heading of section 10 is replaced by the following:*

“10 Additional guidance to chapters 9 and 9-1”

**12 Additional guidance to chapter 11
(Voyage planning)**

8 *The heading of section 12 is replaced by the following:*

“12 Additional guidance to chapters 11 and 11-1”

