IMO REGULATORY UPDATES

IMO Changes Taking Effect on 1 January 2026: What's New?

Global Shipping Faces New IMO Rules from 2026

As 1 January 2026 approaches, international maritime regulations are entering an important period of change. Through a coordinated set of amendments adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), key instruments such as the SOLAS Convention, the STCW Code, and associated IMO resolutions are being recalibrated to respond to evolving operational risks, human-factor challenges, and enforcement gaps observed in recent years.

Rather than introducing isolated technical corrections, the regulatory package reflects a broader policy shift towards preventive safety, formalised accountability, and harmonised global enforcement. The changes affect not only ship design and equipment, but also training standards, reporting obligations, and the legal responsibilities of shipowners and operators.

Anchor Handling Winches and Lifting Appliances

One of the most consequential developments concerns the introduction of mandatory international requirements for anchor handling winches and associated lifting equipment, adopted through amendments to SOLAS Chapter II-1 and detailed in MSC Resolution 532(107). These rules will become applicable from 1 January 2026, as confirmed by both IMO and classification society guidance.

Historically, the safety of lifting appliances and anchor handling equipment was governed primarily by class rules and non-binding guidance, leading to inconsistent practice. across flags and fleets. Under the new framework, this regulatory gap is closed. Equipment with a Safe Working Load (SWL) of 1,000 kg or more is now subject to mandatory design approval, testing, inspection, maintenance, and record-keeping requirements.

For shipowners and technical managers, the impact is immediate: equipment must be checked against the new standards, tested if needed, or taken out of service. Oversight shifts from class guidance to binding rules, raising PSC inspection risk.



Strengthening the Human Element

An equally transformative STCW amendment makes training on preventing violence, harassment, and sexual assault mandatory within Basic Safety Training. The requirement applies from 1 January 2026.

This marks a clear expansion of "maritime safety" beyond purely technical and navigational risks. By embedding these issues into mandatory certification, the IMO formally recognises unsafe social environments as a direct safety hazard. The amendment applies to all seafarers undergoing basic training, as well as to training providers and maritime academies delivering PSSR courses.

From a legal perspective, the reform strengthens the link between training compliance and company responsibility. It raises expectations for proactive management of onboard conduct. Rather than reacting after incidents occur, operators are now expected to prevent them.

Mandatory Reporting of Lost Containers

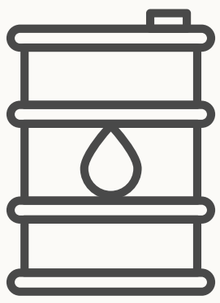
Another key pillar of the 2026 regulatory framework is the introduction of mandatory reporting requirements for lost freight containers, adopted through amendments to SOLAS Chapter V (Regulations 31 and 32). Under the new regime, ships must report:

-Any loss of containers overboard, and
-Any sighting of drifting containers at sea.

If a ship is unable to transmit a report—due to abandonment or operational incapacity—the company assumes the reporting obligation. This explicit allocation of responsibility is significant. It signals a shift from captain-centric obligations to corporate accountability, aligning maritime law with broader trends in international transport and environmental regulation.

The rationale is clear: drifting containers present serious risks to navigation, fishing activity, and the marine environment. By mandating prompt and standardised reporting, the IMO aims to improve situational awareness, coastal state response, and casualty prevention.

Fuel Oil Safety and Documentation



Fuel safety is also addressed through amendments to SOLAS Chapter V (Regulations 31 and 32). From 2026 onwards, fuel suppliers must provide a certified declaration prior to bunkering, confirming compliance with SOLAS flashpoint requirements. (minimum 60°C, unless otherwise specified)

This obligation applies to all SOLAS ships, regardless of size or trade, eliminating prior ambiguities in documentation practices. The amendment reflects IMO's increasing emphasis on upstream compliance, recognising that onboard safety is inseparable from the integrity of supply chains.

For ship operators, this means bunkering procedures must be updated, supplier documentation verified, and crew awareness strengthened to ensure that non-compliant fuel is not accepted on board.

Ban on PFOS-Containing Firefighting Media

From 1 January 2026, the use and carriage of PFOS-containing firefighting media will no longer be permitted on board. PFOS (a type of PFAS) is widely recognised for its persistence and environmental harm, and the IMO's move signals that chemical pollution risks are now treated as part of core safety compliance.

Shipowners and technical managers should identify whether any fixed firefighting systems or stored extinguishing agents contain PFOS, plan timely replacement with compliant alternatives, and enreplacement with compliant alternatives, and ensure that removal and disposal are handled in line with applicable waste and environmental rules.

This is not a "paper" change: the presence of PFOS-containing media may be considered a Port State Control deficiency, raising the risk of findings—especially where documentation, inventory records, and system maintenance logs are incomplete.

Conclusion: A New Compliance Landscape for Global Shipping

The IMO amendments entering into force on 1 January 2026 do not merely update maritime rules; they redefine the expectations placed on shipowners, operators, and administrations. Safety is no longer assessed solely through certificates and hardware, but through systems, training, reporting discipline, and corporate conduct.

For the maritime industry, the message is unambiguous: compliance must be proactive, documented, and embedded into daily operations. In this sense, the 2026 reforms represent a decisive step towards a more accountable, human-centred, and resilient global maritime safety regime.

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