

Voluntary Safety Initiatives and Good Marine Practices for Commercial Fishing Industry Vessels

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On 4 November 2016 the USCG announced that the commercial fishing vessel Alternate Safety Compliance Program (ASCP) was superseded and suspended and being replaced by the “Voluntary Safety Initiatives and Good Marine Practices for Commercial Fishing Industry Vessels (VSI).” The original purpose of the ASCP was for older vessels, which were mostly not built to classification society rules, to meet additional safety measures due to their higher risk. The Coast Guard determined, after discussion with industry and Congress, that even though the law required new guidelines for these older vessels, they could not be enforced without the development of new regulations, so the development of ASCP was stopped until those regulations could be developed. Basically there could not be an ASCP because there was no previous Safety Compliance Program to base an alternate on.

The draft VSI can be found at:

https://www.uscg.mil/hq/cgcvc/cvc3/news_and_activities/VoluntarySafetyInitiativesGoodMarinePracticesForCFVs_10-25-16.pdf.

The 12 subjects are:

- Certificates, Documents, and Records
- Lifesaving Equipment
- Communications Equipment

- Deck Safety Equipment
- Fire Safety Equipment and Practices
- Machinery and Electrical Safety
- Material Condition
- Flooding Prevention
- Periodic Testing of Equipment and Systems
- Refrigerant Safety
- Stability Standards
- Combating Fatigue

As can be seen, the list of requirements covered in the VSI goes beyond the mandatory fishing vessel safety decal subjects, a notable addition being “Combating Fatigue.” The National Transportation Safety Board’s recently released “Safer Seas Digest 2015” mentioned fatigue as the primary cause of accidents in a number of instances. In two cases the captain fell asleep at the wheel. In the third instance, the captain left the bridge before he was relieved, and the crewman who was supposed to relieve him didn’t remember being woken up. In addition, “Refrigerant Safety” and “Periodic Testing of Equipment and Systems” are expanded.

The Coast Guard states that the VSI “should be implemented on non-classed vessels where possible and reasonable.” The subjects in the VSI were compiled from input from the Commercial Fishing Safety Advisory Council (CFSAC) and analysis of commercial fishing fatalities, vessel disasters by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), as well as meetings with industry organizations. However, it should be noted that “this does not preclude individual fleets from modifying these measures because some of the practices may not necessarily apply in all fisheries and operating situations. Fishing organizations representing specific fleets should feel free, and are encouraged, to work with CG District Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety (CFVS) Coordinators to determine the

safety measures in this document that may, or may not, be applicable to their fleet. A fleet-specific safety initiative with good marine practices may also be considered.”

Coast Guard personnel will discuss the VSI and its requirements with owners/ operators during dockside safety examinations and at-sea boardings and inquire to see if any have been implemented on the vessel. One concern is the voluntary nature of the VSI. Owners are allowed to perform the examinations without assistance from a third-party surveyor if a surveyor is not “reasonably available.” This will not necessarily lead to an unbiased examination or improvements to the vessel, and could be seen as putting the fisherman in a conflict of interest situation as well as weakening the effectiveness of the program.

The final version of the VSI is expected out in January 2017. The Coast Guard is continuing to solicit input from industry on the VSI, and FV surveyors are encouraged to contact their CG District CFVS Coordinators with questions, concerns and/or recommendations. They are also requested to contact one of the above authors with their comments as well. Both authors have ties to industry; in addition, Joe Derie is the marine engineer member on the CFSAC. We want to be able to pass on any comments via our channels and direct to USCG Headquarters as well.

One Final Thought:

With regards to the now mandatory FV Fishing Vessel Safety Decals surveyors should understand that Decal exams are now **required every five years**, but the **decal is only good for two years**. In the case of FV's not carrying NMFS observers, this is significant. It is strongly recommended that all surveyors, as a part of their exam protocol, clearly inform their FV owner/operator clients that they should strive to obtain a safety decal exam or COC **every two years**, as part of good marine practice.