

Time running out for crew to get re-trained

Without due caution, the upcoming deadlines for superyacht crew to take the new STCW refresher courses could cause operational bottlenecks

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Fire fighting is a mandatory basic requirement of STCW training. Inset: Lars Lippuner

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Anthony Sands is the founder and director of Edge Yachts, a yacht management company based in Fort Lauderdale and Barcelona. A qualified marine engineer and captain, he also has experience running operational superyachts and working on new build projects as an owner's representative. He started Edge Yachts in 2012 with the philosophy of providing project and yacht management services that assist the captain and crew, but which always keep the owner's interests as the number one priority.

When the IMO (International Maritime Organization) revised its Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) in 2010, it created a set of changes known as the Manila Amendments.

Eclipsed at the time by the MLC 2006, the Manila Amendments were given less attention than they deserved. There were a large number of changes put into place, to be rolled out over the coming years, with the final deadlines for compliance falling on 1 January 2017.

So now it's the first half of 2016, and there are just a few months to deal with what has

become an unavoidable elephant in the room – the STCW refresher courses (called MSN 1865 (M) on the MCA website).

Globally, there more than a million seafarers affected by the STCW refresher course introduction – and all of them are vying for the same spots on the same courses.

To make the situation even more challenging, there are relatively few training schools that have actually been approved to teach the courses. Cruise ship companies and other commercial fleets have already started block-booking classes for their crew at most of the training facilities, so it is now becoming increasingly difficult to get a spot.

Whether you are in command of a superyacht or involved in the operation and

management of one, there are still options open for you to ensure your craft doesn't slip out of compliance at the end of the year.

Port State Control inspections

The rules apply to both private and commercially operating superyachts, above 24m (78ft) load line length. Come 1 January 2017, anyone who works at sea, who is named on the crew list, and has safety related duties (which is almost every crew member) will need to have either completed their Basic STCW training after 1 January 2012 or will need to have completed the newly created refresher courses before the start of 2017.

If your superyacht is boarded by Port State Control (PSC) after 1 Jan 2017, the inspectors can reasonably expect to be presented with original copies of Basic and Advanced (where applicable) STCW courses, as well as the refresher courses, for all relevant crew named on the crew list. If these certificates cannot be provided, the superyacht could be in serious trouble – and prevented from operating. ■■■▶

A million seafarers are vying for the same spots on the same courses, but there are few training schools actually approved to teach the courses

So, if your superyacht has a charter or owner trip starting the next day, it will not be allowed to receive the guests until all the crew on the crew list are legally certified – a very stressful situation which nobody would want to find themselves in.

Technically, if the superyacht is out of the water at a refit yard come Jan 2017, it may buy a couple of months on the certification front, but there is still likely to be a significant backlog of crew looking to get certified at this point. If you are still in the water and rules of safe manning apply (crew on watch, etc), then the new rules will most certainly apply.

Limited places

Most of the refresher courses cannot be taken remotely or on a superyacht, with the exception of the Advanced Fire Fighting, which some, but not all, schools are permitted to teach onboard. Class sizes are limited at each training school, based on staff and facilities size, so this is also going to limit how many crew can get through the courses before the January deadline.

There are only a handful of training schools



STCW requires classroom and practical training



Commercial firms have block-booked courses

It's mainly more senior crew, who have worked in the industry for a long while and took their initial courses some time ago, who will be most affected

able to offer the courses (see the MCA website or those of equivalent agencies for further information) and the number of places available is becoming increasingly limited. Many of the courses for the end of 2016 have already been booked up.

Putting the yacht to one side, if a captain or member of crew does not have the relevant courses completed after 1 January 2017, they will not be able to work on a superyacht nor revalidate their certificate of compliance.

Unavoidable inevitability

At this late stage, the likelihood of postponement of implementation of the rules is very slim. It will not pay to delay action and simply hope that the deadlines will be put back in the next few months.

Warsash Superyacht Academy in the UK is one of the few training schools certified to teach all the refresher modules. Lars Lippuner, who is the director of the training school, is concerned about the escalating situation surrounding the STCW refresher courses.

"I often hear captains say they will deal with it after the next Med season because they don't know how many of their current crew will still be on board by then," he says.

"Fortunately, most junior crew – where the turnover is the highest – will be fine, as in most cases they would have done their Basic STCW after 1 January 2012.

"It's mainly more senior crew who have worked in the industry for a long while and who took their initial courses some time ago, who will be most affected. They're less likely to leave the yacht."

STCW WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The refresher courses a member of crew needs to take will depend on the courses they have already taken, and when:

- If they took Basic STCW courses after 1 Jan 2012, they will need to take the refresher courses before five years has elapsed since they took the course, so they have no need to rush for 1 Jan 2017.
- If they took both Basic and Advanced STCW courses before 1 Jan 2012, they need to take both the Basic and Advanced refresher courses for safety at sea and fire fighting before 1 Jan 2017.
- If they took Basic STCW courses before

The STCW refresher courses are an unavoidable inevitability, and it's important everyone involved with the operation or management of a superyacht knows where the vessel is going to stand in January 2017.

It looks as though PSC is going to be increasing its depth of inspections on certification as a result of the new regulations, so you should be extra vigilant that all certificates are up to date and the originals are kept onboard to prevent a nasty surprises.

This situation is not going to go away – it will not help to bury your head in the sand.

All superyacht operators and managers should make sure they are prepared for this upcoming deadline. **SB**

1 Jan 2012, but advanced courses were taken after 1 Jan 2012, they will only need to have the Basic courses refreshed before 2017, and the Advanced courses refreshed before five years has elapsed since they took them.

Be aware that if it's not long until the Advanced courses are due to be refreshed. The crew member may want to synchronise all their refresher courses to save taking time off work and travel to get to the training schools. Going forward, they would be able to keep them to five-year cycles for refreshers.