



Australian Government

Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Operational and emergency procedures

Guidance: Marine Order 504 changes



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Operational and emergency procedures

From 1 June 2025, Class 1, 2 and 3 vessel owners, including those eligible for a simplified safety management system (SMS), are required to include procedures for key vessel operations to their SMS. They must outline how they will manage the risks relating to these activities, if relevant to the vessel and its operation.

We introduced this change to ensure that higher risk activities associated with vessel operations are included in the SMS.

Procedures for vessel operations - requirements

Full SMS

- Vessel start up and shutdown
- Vessel mooring and berthing
- Vessel bunkering and refuelling
- [Vessel access](#) (embarking/disembarking)
- [Preparation and use of passage plan\(s\)](#)
- For a vessel with a confined space – confined space entry
- For a vessel that carries cargo – cargo operations including the [carriage of dangerous goods as cargo](#).

Eligible for simplified SMS

- [Vessel access](#) (embarking/disembarking)

Note: There are other procedures you need to include if eligible for simplified SMS.

How to add procedures for vessel operations

Note: Some work activities are regulated by WHS regulations and codes of practice. This includes activities such as confined space, entry, and dangerous goods. Make sure you check relevant regulations and codes of practice before developing your procedures.

Level of detail: The level of detail in your procedures depends on the size and complexity of your operation.

An operational procedure for an operation eligible for a simplified SMS may be a just a series of dot points/tasks. A procedure for a more complex operation may need to be more detailed.

Step 1. Do a risk assessment

Identify risks involved with the key vessel operations, and ways to control the risks. Record these in your risk assessment, in your SMS.

Step 2. Develop procedures

Develop procedures relating to these vessel operations, taking into account any risks and controls you identified. Record these procedures in your SMS.

Scenarios and examples

6.5m Class 2D work boat – access (embarking) procedure

The owner/operator of a 6.5m work boat eligible for a simplified SMS launches and retrieves their vessel from boat ramps in the local area.

They consider the risks associated with launching and retrieving the vessel, including boarding and disembarking, using the knowledge gained from working in the area for over 10 years. This includes consideration of tides, water depth, weather, condition of boat ramps and interacting with other boat ramp users.

Based on the knowledge and experience of the owner and their crew, they develop a procedure for launching and retrieving the vessel that includes access and embarking.

Operational procedure - launch from boat ramps

- Check weather conditions prior to leaving home
- Visually inspect boat ramp for signs of wear and tear and obstructions
- Visually inspect water for tidal movement, water depth and wind direction
- Undertake pre-launch checks (bungs in place, strapping removed)
- Once satisfied is safe and boat ramp is clear, reverse trailer
- Crew member to monitor reversing vehicle from safe distance
- Launch vessel
- Crew member to give master mooring line and then board vessel via boarding ladder
- Master to secure vessel to jetty
- Master parks vehicle and trailer and then boards vessel from jetty

Procedures for emergencies

From 1 June 2025, all vessel owners, including those eligible for a simplified SMS, are required to add procedures for emergency situations to their SMS, if relevant to the vessel and its operation. They must also outline how they will manage the risks relating to these emergencies.

We introduced this change because we identified that certain emergencies carry higher levels of risk which need to be managed.

Emergencies

- Loss of propulsion
- Oil or fuel spill

How to add emergency procedures

Level of detail: The level of detail in your procedures depends on the size and complexity of your operation.

An emergency procedure for an operation eligible for a simplified SMS may be a just a series of dot points/tasks. A procedure for a more complex operation may be much more detailed.

Follow these steps to develop a policy for an operation of any size.

Step 1. Do a risk assessment

Identify risks involved with these emergencies, and ways to control the risks. Record these in your risk assessment, in your SMS.

Step 2. Develop procedures

Develop procedures relating to these emergencies, taking into account any risks and controls you identified. Record these procedures in your SMS.

Scenarios and examples

6.5m Class 2D work boat – loss propulsion emergency procedure

The owner/operator of a 6.5m work boat eligible for a simplified SMS operates within sheltered waters undertaking maintenance work on jetties and marinas for local government authorities. Work is typically undertaken within 400m of shore.

The owner, in consultation with the crew, considers the risks and implements a procedure in the event of loss of propulsion.

Emergency procedure - loss of propulsion

Ensure outboard motor is serviced in accordance with manufacturer's instructions

Should outboard break down:

- Assess situation to see if any faults can be identified
- If vessel is drifting deploy the anchor
- Crew member to maintain lookout
- Master to repair if possible
- If repair not possible and close to shore or jetty, use oars to move to safety
- If not possible to move to safety, use radio or mobile phone to alert emergency contact or other vessels in area that you need assistance

Questions and answers

Q. I already have a drug and alcohol policy. Do I need to do anything?

A. If you already have a drug and alcohol policy in place to meet your work health and safety (WHS) obligations, check that:

- a copy is included in the vessel's SMS
- you have inducted all your existing crew on the policy
- you are inducting all new crew when they join the vessel, and
- you regularly train your crew on the reasons for having the policy.

Q: What do you mean by dangerous goods?

A: For the purposes of Marine Order 504, dangerous goods mean those packaged dangerous goods that fall within the application of clause 4 of the [National Code of Practice for the Storage and Handling of Workplace Dangerous Goods \(NOHSC: 2017 \(2001\)\)](#).

Q: How does AMSA define cargo?

A: For the purposes of Marine Order 504, cargo of a vessel does not include ballast for the vessel or goods intended for consumption or use on the vessel.

Q: Can a vessel that has never been authorised to carry dangerous goods begin to carry them?

A: The carriage of dangerous goods has implications for a vessel's certification. Under [Marine Order 503 \(Certificates of survey\)](#) the carriage of dangerous goods is both a modifier (increasing the survey frequency) and a [transitional vessel](#) trigger. As such, an existing vessel that starts carrying dangerous goods will become transitional. This will require compliance with the applicable sections of NSCV Section C4 – Fire safety concerning the carriage of dangerous goods.

New vessels will also be subject to the requirements of NSCV C4 for the carriage of dangerous goods.

An application for initial survey will be required prior to the vessel commencing operations with dangerous goods. For details of the dangerous goods carriage requirements refer to [NSCV C4](#).

Contact

Got a question about this requirement? Please [contact us](#).