



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries.
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MERCHANT SHIPPING NOTICE Ref: 1 of 2026

Title: Implementation of new STCW training requirements on sexual harassment onboard vessels

Notice to: **Ship Owners/Operators/Maritime Training Institutions/Masters/Skippers/Ship's Recruitment Agencies/DPAs**

The objective of this Merchant Shipping Notice is to inform all those concerned of the Implementation of a new training module that teaches seafarers how to prevent and respond to violence, bullying, sexual harassment, and sexual assault on board. This module has officially been added to the STCW requirements and must be completed by all seafarers as from 1st January 2026.

1. Background

The maritime industry is undergoing a significant shift in how it handles crew welfare. As of **January 1, 2026**, new mandatory training requirements under the **STCW Convention** 1978 (as amended) have officially come into effect to combat sexual harassment, bullying, and sexual assault (SASH) at sea.

2. Purpose

This STCW amendment marks one of the most important upgrades in modern maritime training towards human safety, the aim is to achieve this by making anti-harassment and violence prevention training compulsory, the industry is moving toward a safer, more respectful and more professional working environment for all workers at sea.

3. Applicability

Everyone who undergoes the PSSR module as part of basic safety training must complete the new module. This includes new seafarers, cadets, and anyone taking the course on or after 1 January 2026.

This Office considers that existing PSSR certificates remain valid. However, the new module is to be completed during the next **refresher course** or prior revalidation exercise or as part of company-specific SMS (Safety Management System) updates.

It has also been noted that many major shipping companies are now requiring this training as a prerequisite for boarding to align with their **Zero Tolerance** policies. Therefore, all seafarers shall comply with the requirements of their employers.

4. Requirements:

This Merchant Shipping Notice is to be used as an **Annex** to the Training Guidelines already circulated to Maritime Training Institutions. The new training defines the mandatory requirements under IMO Resolution MSC. 560 (108) which introduces new contents on preventing violence and harassment to the Personal Safety and Social Responsibilities (PSSR) course (STCW Code, Table A-VI/1-4) since 1 January 2026.

5. Core Competency Requirements

The new standard requires every seafarer to "contribute to the prevention of and response to violence and harassment." Training must cover three specific areas:

- a. **Sexual Harassment:** Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- b. **Bullying:** Repeated, unreasonable behavior directed towards a worker or group that creates a risk to health and safety.
- c. **Sexual Assault:** Physical sexual contact that involves force or occurs without consent.

6. Suggested Resources for Trainers

- **IMO Model Course 1.21:** Currently being updated to reflect these changes.
- **ICS/ITF Guidance:** The *Guidance on Eliminating Shipboard Harassment and Bullying* remains the industry gold standard for policy templates.
- **Flag State Instructions:** This MSN No. 1 of 2026- **(Including all the Annexes 1-5).**

7. Mandatory Knowledge & Curriculum

To meet the new STCW standards, the training curriculum shall include the following, namely:

Subject Area	Key Learning Objectives
The Continuum of Harm	Understanding how "minor" jokes or comments can escalate into serious harassment or physical assault.
Contributing Factors	Identifying how power imbalances, isolation, fatigue, stress, and alcohol abuse create high-risk environments.
Impact Assessment	Recognizing the consequences of harassment on victim mental health, crew cohesion, and overall ship safety.
Trauma-Informed Response	Basic principles on how to interact with victims and bystanders without causing further harm or "victim-blaming."

8. Practical Training & Implementation

The IMO suggest the following for training providers and shipowners:

- a. **Recognition Skills:** Use case studies and "real-world" maritime scenarios (e.g., cultural diversity issues, close living quarters) to help seafarers identify unacceptable behavior early.
- b. **Intervention & Reporting:** Clear instruction on the "Bystander Intervention" (or "Upstander") model—teaching crew how to safely step in when they witness harassment.
- c. **Internal vs. External Reporting:** Seafarers must be taught the company's internal grievance procedures (ISM Code) and their right to report to external authorities (Flag State or Port State Control).

9. The curriculum:

SR NO.	SUBJECT AREA	NO. OF HOURS
1.0	Contribute to the prevention of and response to violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault	
1.1	Prevention of violence and harassment:	Not exceeding 1.5 hours
	<p>1. basic knowledge and understanding of violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault, and the continuum of harm</p> <p>2. remember basic concepts such as violence, harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, sexual assault, victims, perpetrators, bystanders, stakeholders, safety, health, and well-being</p> <p>3. list causes of violence, harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, and sexual assault</p> <p>4. identify causes of violence, harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, and sexual assault related to different cultures, religions, and traditions</p> <p>5. recognize cyber-harassment and cyber-bullying</p> <p>6. basic knowledge and understanding of the consequences of violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault on victims, perpetrators, bystanders and stakeholders, and its effects on safety, health and well-being</p> <p>7. recognize the consequences of violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault on victims, perpetrators, bystanders and stakeholders, and its effects on safety, health and well-being on board ships</p>	

	<p>8. analyse the consequences of not preventing violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault on victims, perpetrators, bystanders and stakeholders, and its effects on safety, health and well-being on board ships</p> <p>9. value teamwork, respect for cultural, religious, gender and ethnic diversity, as well as conflict management and the creation of an inclusive work environment</p> <p>10. understand that, among others, abuse of power relations, discrimination, stress, isolation, fatigue, drugs or alcohol may contribute to violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault</p> <p>11. describe the underlying causes of violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault</p> <p>12. identify potential conditions and attitudes, which could increase the risk of violence and harassment on board</p> <p>13. identify the factors and risks that may contribute to violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault on board</p>	
2.2	Responding to violence and harassment	Not Exceeding 1.5 hours
	<p>1. ability to identify violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault</p> <p>2. identify behaviours which could trigger violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault</p> <p>3. recognize victims, perpetrators, and bystanders</p> <p>4. basic knowledge of the action to take to intervene in and report violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault</p> <p>5. describe the basic procedures to intervene in and report violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault</p>	

	<p>6. apply the basic procedures to intervene in and report violence and harassment including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault</p> <p>7. record cases of violence, harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault</p> <p>8. understand the basic principles of trauma-informed response and how to provide appropriate support to a victim, bystanders and self.</p> <p>9. describe trauma informed response</p> <p>10. indicate appropriate action to be taken for a trauma-informed response</p> <p>11. demonstrate how to support victims and bystander</p>	
TOTAL		Not exceeding 3 HOURS

ANNEX 1

Explanation to Trainers

In the context of the new **STCW Sexual Harassment and Disaster Prevention** training, the **Continuum of Harm** is a visual and conceptual tool used to illustrate how "minor" behaviors create a culture that allows serious violence to occur.

The core idea is that **physical sexual assault does not happen in a vacuum**. It is almost always preceded by a progression of increasingly disrespectful behaviors that were ignored or "normalized" by the crew.

1. The Stages of the Continuum

Think of it as a pyramid or a ladder. The wide base represents common, everyday behaviors, while the narrow peak represents criminal acts.

a. The Base: Normalization (The "Culture")

This is where the environment is "primed." If these are ignored, harassment becomes inevitable.

- i. **Sexist jokes and "banter"** (e.g., "Women don't belong on tankers").
- ii. **Objectifying language** or rating colleagues' appearances.
- iii. **Gender-based stereotypes** (e.g., assuming a certain gender is better at paperwork than deck work).

b. The Middle: Non-Physical Harassment

The behavior becomes targeted and creates a "hostile work environment."

- i. **Inappropriate comments** about someone's body or private life.
- ii. **Persistent unwanted attention** (e.g., repeatedly asking a crewmate to watch a movie in a cabin after they said no).
- iii. **Displaying offensive material** (e.g., pornography in common areas or the engine control room).
- iv. **Quid Pro Quo**: Hinting that a promotion or a good appraisal depends on "favors."

c. The Top: Physical & Criminal Acts

The point of no return. This is often where companies finally step in, but by then, the damage is severe.

- i. **Unwanted touching**: "Accidental" brushes, rubbing shoulders, or grabbing.
 - ii. **Stalking**: Following a crewmate around the ship or hovering outside their cabin.
 - iii. **Sexual Assault**: Forced physical contact or any sexual act without clear, enthusiastic consent.
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2. Why the Continuum Matters for Seafarers

The IMO introduced this concept because, historically, maritime culture has dismissed the "Base" of the pyramid as "just life at sea."

- i. **The "Broken Windows" Theory:** If you allow "small" jokes to slide, you signal to potential offenders that the ship's culture is permissive. This emboldens them to move up the continuum to more dangerous behaviors.
- ii. **The Impact on Safety:** A victim at the "Middle" stage of the continuum is already distracted, stressed, and fatigued. In a high-risk environment like a mooring deck or an engine room, a distracted seafarer is a safety hazard to the entire ship.

3. Intervention Points

The goal of STCW training is to teach crew members to **intervene at the bottom of the continuum.**

Example: If a crew member stops a sexist joke in the mess room (**The Base**), they effectively "break" the continuum and prevent the behavior from ever reaching the level of physical assault (**The Top**).

4. Comparison Table: Old View vs. New STCW View

Feature	The Old "Traditional" View	The New STCW/IMO View
Focus	Only act if someone is physically hurt.	Act at the first sign of disrespect.
Banter	"It's just a joke; grow a thick skin."	Banter is the foundation of the Continuum of Harm.
Responsibility	It's between the two people involved.	It's a safety issue for the whole crew.

ANNEX 2

Checklist of "Red Flags"

a. For a Master, Chief Engineer, or Officer of the Watch, identifying a toxic culture before it results in a serious incident is a key part of Safety Management. The transition from "friendly crew" to a hostile environment often happens subtly.

b. Here is a checklist of "Red Flags" categorized by the stages of the Continuum of Harm.

Phase 1: Environmental Red Flags (The Foundation)

These signs indicate the "base" of the pyramid is being established. If ignored, these behaviors normalize disrespect.

- Gendered "Banter": Frequent jokes that rely on stereotypes or demeaning language regarding gender, even if no one is "complaining" yet.
- Exclusionary Behavior: Certain crew members are consistently left out of social gatherings in the mess room or treated as "outsiders" during work tasks.
- The "Testing the Waters" Comments: A senior crew member making increasingly personal or suggestive comments to see if they get a reaction or if anyone objects.
- Visual Environment: Presence of suggestive or inappropriate posters, calendars, or digital media in shared workspaces (Engine Control Room, Bridge, or Galley).

Phase 2: Behavioral Red Flags (The Escalation)

These are direct indicators that someone is being targeted. This is the critical point for intervention.

- Unwarranted "Mentorship": A senior officer insists on "helping" a specific junior crew member during their off-watch hours or in private spaces (like their cabin) when it isn't required.
- Changes in Performance: A previously competent seafarer suddenly becomes distracted, makes uncharacteristic mistakes, or seems hesitant to go to certain parts of the ship.
- Social Withdrawal: A crew member who used to be social now stays in their cabin immediately after their watch and avoids communal meals.
- The "Watchdog" Effect: Seeing one crew member constantly "checking in" on another or hovering around them without a clear operational reason.

Phase 3: Systemic & Reporting Red Flags

These signs suggest that the ship's leadership is losing (or has lost) control of the culture.

- The "Don't Be a Snitch" Narrative: Crew members openly mocking the company's grievance policy or the new STCW training requirements.
- High Turnover/Request for Transfers: Frequent requests from junior crew or specific demographics to sign off early or transfer to another vessel without a clear personal reason.
- Silence During Safety Meetings: When the topic of "Bullying and Harassment" is brought up, the room goes silent or people look at the floor rather than engaging.
- Victim-Blaming Language: Hearing officers say things like, "*If they can't handle the heat, they shouldn't be at sea,*" in response to minor complaints.

c. The Officer's "Action Trigger"

If you check three or more boxes in Phase 1, or any boxes in Phase 2, the culture has already moved up the Continuum.

Immediate Steps for Officers:

1. Interrupt the "Banter": Even if it seems harmless, stopping a sexist joke immediately signals that the standard has changed.
2. Private Check-ins: If you notice a crew member withdrawing, have a private, low-pressure conversation: "*I've noticed you've been quiet lately. Is everything okay with the team dynamics on your watch?*"
3. Visible Support: Ensure the company's anonymous reporting line and the "Designated Person Ashore" (DPA) contact details are clearly posted and have not been defaced or covered.

ANNEX 3

SCENARIO ON DECK

This scenario is designed for Deck Officers and Ratings, focusing on Bridge Resource Management (BRM) and the safety implications of a hostile environment during high-stakes operations.

a. Scenario: The "Distracted" Night Watch

Setting: The Bridge during a night transit approaching a busy pilot station.

1. The Setup

A Junior Third Officer (the "Target") is on watch with a senior Able Seaman (the "Subject"). The Third Officer is relatively new to the vessel. The AB, who has been with the company for ten years, begins making suggestive comments about the Third Officer's personal life and relationship status.

When the Third Officer tries to focus on the ARPA radar and the Electronic Chart Display (ECDIS), the AB moves closer, leans over her shoulder to "look at the screen," and says:

"You know, you're much too pretty to be staring at a screen all night. A girl like you should be out having fun in port, not stuck here with these grumpy old sailors. Maybe I can show you the 'best' spots when we hit the dock tomorrow? I promise it'll be more exciting than this."

2. The Conflict

The Third Officer is trying to monitor three approaching targets and prepare for the Pilot's arrival. She feels trapped in the corner of the bridge wing. She ignores the comment, but her hands are shaking, and she misses a VHF call from the VTS (Vessel Traffic Services).

The Cadet (the "Bystander") is on the bridge to learn night navigation. He hears the comments and sees the Third Officer's visible distress and the missed radio call.

3. Intervention Strategies (The "5 Ds")

How should the Cadet or a passing Duty Officer intervene?

- Direct: The Cadet says, *"Hey, we just missed a VTS call. AB, can you step back so the Third Officer can reach the radio? We need to focus on the traffic right now."* (Refocuses on the safety of the ship).
- Distract: The Cadet approaches the AB with a clipboard: *"The Chief Officer asked me to verify the mooring line inventory with you before we hit port. Can we go over that now?"* (Physically removes the subject from the Bridge).
- Delegate: The Cadet notices the Third Officer is overwhelmed and calls the Bridge via the internal phone from the chart table: *"Third Officer, I think the Captain is awake and checking the sensors from his cabin; should I inform him we are approaching the pilot station?"* (A subtle reminder that senior oversight is "watching").

- Delay: After the watch ends, the Cadet speaks to the Third Officer: *"I saw how he was acting. That was unprofessional and it clearly messed up the watch flow. Do you want to report that, or should I mention the distraction to the Navigator?"*
- Document: The Cadet notes in his personal journal:
 - *03:45 – AB made suggestive comments to 3/O.*
 - *03:50 – 3/O missed VTS call due to the distraction. Bridge atmosphere was tense.*

4. Debrief Questions for the Deck Team

- i. Navigational Safety: How did the AB's behavior directly create a "Near Miss" in this scenario? (Answer: The missed VTS call and loss of Situational Awareness).
- ii. The "Seniority" Trap: Even though the Third Officer outranks the AB, why might she feel unable to stop his comments? (Answer: Fear of being labeled "difficult" or "sensitive" by a long-term crew member).
- iii. Bridge Culture: If the Captain walks onto the Bridge and hears the AB's "pretty" comment and laughs, what does that do to the Continuum of Harm?

ANNEX 4

Scenario in Engine Room

This scenario is designed to be used during a crew safety meeting or a formal STCW PSSR refresher. It focuses on the "**Grey Area**"—the moment where behavior transitions from "workplace banter" to harassment—and emphasizes the **5 Ds of Bystander Intervention** (Direct, Distract, Delegate, Delay, Document). (Source: Internet)

a. Scenario: The "Helpful" Senior Engineer

Setting: Engine Room Workshop during a busy maintenance period.

1. The Setup

A junior female Fourth Engineer (the "Target") is struggling to disassemble a stubborn fuel pump. A senior Second Engineer (the "Subject") walks over. Instead of offering technical advice, he stands uncomfortably close, places his hand over hers on the wrench, and says loudly enough for others to hear:

"Don't worry, honey. You're too delicate for this heavy lifting. Why don't you go make us some coffee while a real man finishes this? You'll get your hands all dirty."

He continues to hold her hand on the tool for several seconds after she tries to pull away. Other crew members (the "Bystanders") are nearby cleaning filters and clearly see the interaction.

2. The Conflict

The Fourth Engineer looks visibly uncomfortable and stops working, but she doesn't speak up because the Second Engineer is her direct supervisor and writes her performance reports.

3. Intervention Strategies (The "5 Ds")

During the training, ask the crew how they would react using these five methods:

- **Direct:** A peer says, *"Hey Second, she was doing fine. Let her finish the job so she learns. Also, let's keep the 'honey' comments for home, yeah?"* (Calm but firm).
- **Distract:** A bystander drops a heavy tool nearby or interrupts: *"Chief is looking for you in the control room right now, it sounded urgent!"* (Breaks the tension and allows the target to move away).
- **Delegate:** A junior oiler who feels uncomfortable speaking up goes to the Third Engineer or the Chief Engineer and says, *"I think there's a weird situation in the workshop, could you come check on the progress?"*
- **Delay:** After the Second Engineer leaves, a crewmate checks in: *"That was uncool. Are you okay? Do you want me to be there next time he's supervising you?"*
- **Document:** A witness records the time, date, and exactly what was said in a personal logbook in case the Fourth Engineer decides to file a formal grievance later.

4. Debrief Questions for the Crew

To ensure the STCW competency is met, facilitate a discussion using these points:

- i. **Safety Impact:** How does the Second Engineer's behavior affect the Fourth Engineer's focus and the overall safety of the engine room?
- ii. **Power Dynamics:** Why is it harder for a junior officer to "just say no" to a senior officer?
- iii. **The "Banter" Defense:** If the Second Engineer says, "*I was just joking, don't be so sensitive,*" does that make the behavior acceptable under the new STCW guidelines? (**Answer:** No. Harassment is defined by the *impact* on the recipient, not the *intent* of the subject.)

Tip for Trainers: When running this scenario, emphasize that "Silence is Consent." By saying nothing, the bystanders are effectively telling the Second Engineer that his behavior is acceptable on this ship, i.e. they are tolerating his behaviour.

References

The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978

IMO Model Course 1.21: Currently being updated to reflect these changes.

ICS/ITF Guidance: The *Guidance on Eliminating Shipboard Harassment and Bullying* remains the industry gold standard for policy templates.

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