

Maritime Vessel Security - After July 1, 2004

After September 11, 2001, both the U.S. Congress and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) resolved to develop comprehensive maritime security standards. On November 25, 2002, Congress passed the Marine Transportation Safety Act (MTSA), and on December 12, 2002 IMO adopted amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. Together, the MTSA and ISPS Code provide statutory and international instruments to implement security measures for the nation's maritime community. July 1, 2004 marks the full implementation and enforcement of the MTSA and ISPS Code. This date probably marks one of the more significant days in maritime history.

ISPS Code & MTSA Applicability Chart for Foreign and U.S. Domestic Vessels.		
VESSEL TYPE	ISPS	MTSA
Passenger		
0 to 99 GT	X	
100 to 149 GT	X	X
150 to 399 GT	X	X
Over 400 GT	X	X
Tank Ships		
0 to 99 GT		X
100 to 149 GT		X
150 to 499 GT		X
Over 500 GT	X	X
Cargo Ships		
0 to 99 GT		X
100 to 149 GT		X
150 to 399 GT		X
400 to 499 GT		X
Over 500 GT	X	X

GT = Gross Tonnage

An MTSA Web site has been set up for the general public at: www.uscg.mil/hq/gm/mp/port_security_offices_shtml.

All U.S. vessels that carry more than 12 passengers or that are more than 500 gross tons (ITC), that engage in international voyages, are required to meet Title 33, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 104, as well as SOLAS Chapter XI-2 and the ISPS Code.

Vessels that comply with these national and international standards will be issued an International Ship Security Certificate (ISSC), and a Continuous Synopsis Record (CSR). Failure to do so will result in the vessel being prohibited from operating internationally.

Reference: United States Coast Guard, Proceedings, Spring 2004.

U.S. Domestic Enforcement Options - Vessels subject to security plan approval must have submitted their plans by December 31, 2003. After July 1, 2004 vessels that have not submitted a security plan, or are not in compliance with an approved security plan, the U.S. Coast Guard may have operations terminated including removal of the vessel's Certificate of Inspection.

Foreign Vessels Visiting U.S. Ports - All vessels arriving in the U.S. for their first arrival after July 1, 2004 will be boarded for ISPS/MTSA compliance, unless they have undergone an examination during the pre-enforcement period. The Coast Guard intends to aggressively enforce the ISPS Code on foreign vessels. Any deviation from the Vessel or Ship Security Plan will be considered "clear grounds" to initiate control actions.

The Coast Guard has developed an information help desk to answer all questions related to MTSA and ISPS implementation.

The help desk operates weekdays from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. EST at (877) MTSA-Aid [(877) 687-2243] or (202) 366-9991.

Security questions can be sent by e-mail to: uscgregs@comdt.uscg.mil.