

MARPOL

The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of Ships, 1973 (MARPOL 73/78)

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Summary

The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of Ships, 1973 was adopted in 1973. This Convention was subsequently modified by the Protocol 1978 relating thereto, which was adopted in 1978. The Protocol introduced stricter regulations for the survey and certification of ships. It is to be read as one instrument and is usually referred to as MARPOL 73/78.

This IMO Convention is the most important global treaty for the prevention of pollution from the operation of ships; it governs the design and equipment of ships; establishes system of certificates and inspections; requires states to provide reception facilities for the disposal of oily waste and chemicals. It covers all the technical aspects of pollution from ships, except the disposal of waste into the sea by dumping, and applies to ships of all types, although it does not apply to pollution arising out of the exploration and exploitation of sea-bed mineral resources.

Regulations covering the various sources of ship-generated pollution are contained in the six Annexes of the London Convention and are updated regularly. Annexes I and II, governing oil and chemicals are compulsory but annexes III, IV, V and VI on packaged materials, sewage, garbage and air pollution are optional.

Annex I: Regulations for the Prevention of Pollution by Oil

Entry into force: 2 October 1983

Details the discharge criteria and requirements for the prevention of pollution by oil and oily substances. It maintains predominantly the oil discharge criteria prescribed in the 1969 amendments to the 1954 Oil Pollution Convention. Beside technical guidelines it contains the concept of "special areas" which are considered to be vulnerable to pollution by oil. Discharges of oil within them have been completely prohibited, with minor well-defined exceptions.

Annex II: Regulations for the Control of Pollution by Noxious Liquid Substances in Bulk

Entry into force: 6 April 1987

Details the discharge criteria and measures for the control of pollution by noxious liquid substances carried in bulk. It subdivides substances into and contains detailed operational standards and procedures. Some 250 substances were evaluated and included in the list appended to the London Convention. The discharge of their residues is allowed only to reception facilities until certain concentrations and conditions (which vary with the category of substances) are complied with. In any case, no discharge of residues containing noxious substances is permitted within 12 miles of the nearest land. More stringent restrictions apply to "special areas".

Annex III: Regulations for the Prevention of Pollution by Harmful Substances Carried by Sea in Packaged Form

Entry into force: 1 July 1992

Contains general requirements for the issuing of detailed standards on packing, marking, labeling, documentation, stowage, quantity limitations, exceptions and notifications for preventing pollution by harmful substances. The Annex should be implemented through the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code, which has been amended to include marine pollutants. The amendments entered into force on 1 January 1991.

Annex IV: Regulations for the Prevention of Pollution by Sewage from Ships

Entry into force: 27 September 2003". Contains requirements to control pollution of the sea by sewage from ships.

Annex V: Regulations for the Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships

Entry into force: 31 December 1988

This deals with different types of garbage and specifies the distances from land and the manner in which they may be disposed of. The requirements are much stricter in a number of "special areas" but perhaps the most important feature of the Annex is the complete ban imposed on the dumping into the sea of all forms of plastic.

Annex VI: Regulations for the Prevention of Air Pollution from Ships and NOx Technical Code

Not yet into force: 12 months after being ratified by 15 States whose combined fleet of merchant ships constitute at least 50% of the world fleet. Contains requirements to control the air pollution from ships. It provides guidelines and provisions for the emission of different substances and specifies the requirements for the testing, survey and certification of marine diesel engines to ensure they comply with the NOx limits. Amendments are made regularly. Generally they facilitate the implementation of annexes, extend the concept of "special areas", establish more sea areas as "special areas", replace list of substances, design new construction standards for ships, precise reporting requirements and reduce amount of oil which can be discharged into the sea from ships.