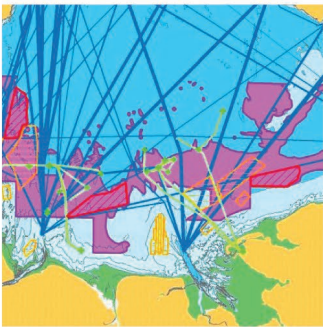
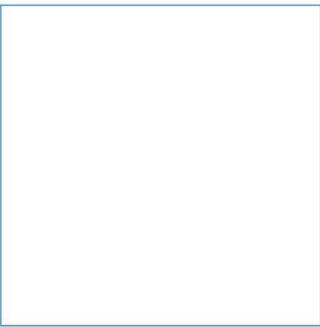
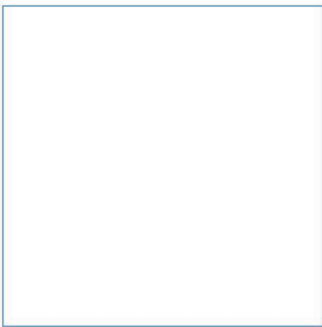


Briefing Note

What Makes a Good Marine Safety Management System?

April 2025

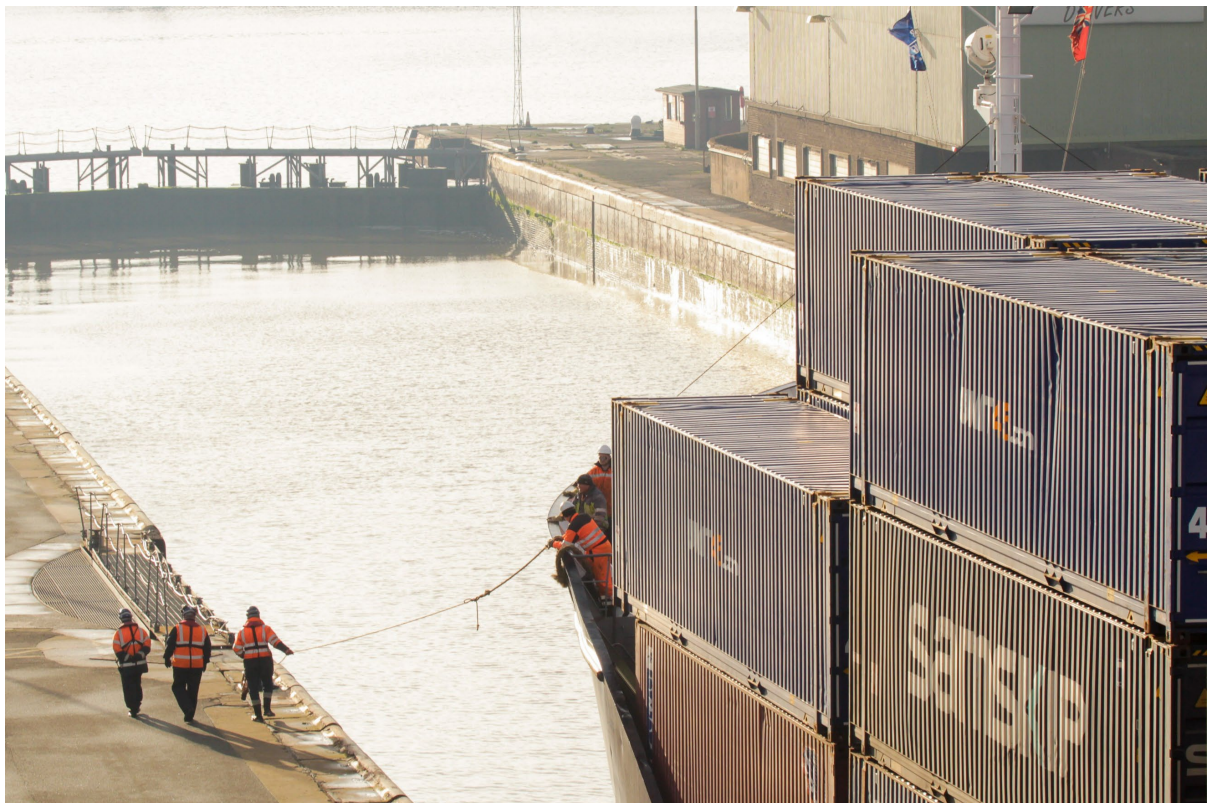


Innovative Thinking - Sustainable Solutions

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What Makes a Good Marine Safety Management System

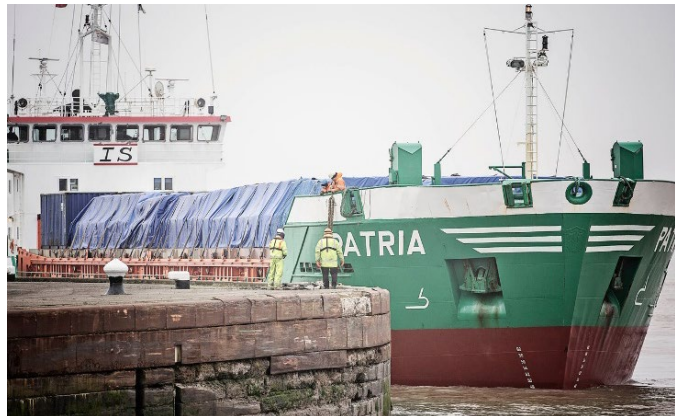
April 2025



Implementing a marine safety management system

A Marine Safety Management System, or MSMS, is one of the 10 key compliance measures required under the Ports & Marine Facilities Safety Code (PMSC, commonly referred to as 'The Code'), the UK national standard for safe port marine operations.

This is neatly summarised within The Code as Measure 6 which says *"organisations must operate an effective MSMS which is based on formal risk assessment."*



What makes a good MSMS?

With over 1,700 ports and marine facilities in public, private and trust ownership, there is a wide variety of safety management systems in active use. The best of these uses a combination of the following essential aspects:

Policies and procedures – relevant policies are held in the MSMS, ideally with clear links to procedures which deliver the commitments laid out by policy articles.

Roles and responsibilities – are defined in the MSMS, using a structure diagram or sections with subject matter and topic heads aligned to different roles and organisation job profiles. This should consider matters of port/berth safety, engineering, marine environmental responsibilities, conservancy, vessel traffic management and where relevant, pilotage. The role of the Duty Holder and Designated Person must also be clearly identified in the MSMS.

Risk – one of the central tenants of The Code is that marine risk is managed to a point considered to be *'as low as reasonably practicable'* (Measure 5 of The Code). The MSMS must therefore incorporate this requirement. It would be reasonable to expect that a process or system is used to evaluate marine risk, an example is provided in the 'guide to good practice'. The MSMS should provide reference, and often detail, on how this is achieved.

Competence – a difficult area to define and achieve is Measure 8 of The Code, requiring the use of competent people. The MSMS should incorporate reference to training matrices, matched to job roles and responsibilities, using National Occupational Standards where possible. The MSMS should identify how competence (defined as trained, qualified and experienced) is to be monitored and evaluated.

Emergency planning – this topic should be carefully considered with reference to the organisation or harbour authority size, function, complexity and available resources. Emergency plans prepared to deal with a pollution event, shore-side or marine emergency; along with any local Council or City plans should be referenced within the MSMS.

An MSMS is a set of accountabilities, policies and procedures that seek to assure safe and efficient operations

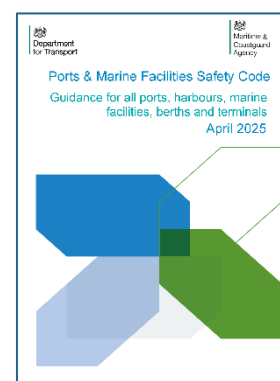
Consensus – the MSMS should detail the consultation arrangements. This could be organised events for internal or external port and terminal users, or may be open invitation port community meetings. The MSMS can be used to describe the number, timings, and intent of the consultation programme.

Reporting – the MSMS should outline how the system is evaluated and reported on. This would typically include details on the auditing regime, both internal and external (Measure 7 of The Code) plus any plans or reports published as public statements. Typically, the organisation or harbour authority will publish a report at least every three years (Measure 9) assessing performance against its safety plan for marine operations.



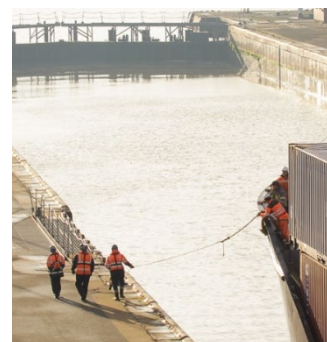
Six tips for authoring your MSMS

- 1. Look at what you already have.** Ports, harbours, marinas, terminals and other marine facilities that have operated for years, if not centuries, will have developed ways of doing things; often through careful consideration and gradual change to the system to create safe and efficient methods for operating their harbour or facility. Have these been written down? This becomes the starting point. If these procedures have been documented, could they be turned into Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)? This requires a clearly thought-out format, and contribution from personnel who carry out the functions.
- 2. Layout a structure.** Before starting the MSMS in detail, it is useful to design a framework to build upon. Where better to look than The Code's 'guide to good practice'? But do not feel constrained by this if there are other aspects of port operations that need to be added (finance, slipway cleaning, boat park processes, etc). The MSMS needs to fit the harbour or facility; The Code should therefore be used as guidance, but not as a rigid template.
- 3. Keep it simple.** The best systems are easy to follow and cut to the point. It is tempting to write everything down, in case it is needed, but keeping the system as a high-level framework referencing policies, plans, SOPs and databases helps to make the MSMS succinct. It is also more likely to be used if it is quick and easy to navigate.
- 4. Ask "Does it need to be a document?"** Whilst it can be easier to describe all aspects of the MSMS within a structured document, this need not be the case. The system itself can be many interconnecting plans, directions, guideline documents, databases and processes. A way of visualising these is useful, such as a structure diagram that identifies the various components. Where an organisation or harbour authority operates from within a larger company, the existing company system should be used where practical. All too often, it is felt that a separate MSMS is required and is created to ensure compliance. This is not a necessary, as long as the requirements of The Code can be delivered with the company's existing system and processes.
- 5. Check it is all covered.** The Code provides a set of topics that should be addressed by all organisations. The Guide to Good Practice provides more detail, from a practitioner perspective. It can be a useful cross-check to compare each section of The Code with the MSMS and consider if it has been suitably considered.



The guide to good practice also provides examples of delivery. It should be remembered however, that there are many ways to achieve the requirements laid out in The Code, some of which may be more suited to the size and scale of your organisation.

6. **Get help.** It can be useful to review the MSMS with help and input from others. A peer review carried out by a similar organisation or external reviewer can provide a useful commentary. Organisations such as the UK Harbour Masters' Association also provide a sounding board for testing options for developing a robust MSMS, suited to the needs of your organisation.



Here to help

We have a wealth of experience providing support to all kinds of port operations. Our Master Mariners, marine scientists, policy advisors, software developers and PMSC auditors provide a total risk assessment solution tailored to the needs of the port sector. For more information, visit our [dedicated port risk management website](#).

Our in-depth knowledge of the PMSC, combined with our understanding of the port industry, make us the first choice for developing a port's MSMS.

If you require any assistance in developing or maintaining an MSMS, please contact our maritime specialists on +44 (0) 2380 711 892 or [email us](#).

References

A guide to good practice on port and marine facilities (DfT, 2025)

Ports & Marine Facilities Safety Code (DfT, 2025)

Abbreviations/Acronyms

ABPmer	ABP Marine Environmental Research Ltd
MSMS	Marine Safety Management System
PMSC	Ports & Marine Facilities Safety Code
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
The Code	Ports & Marine Facilities Safety Code
UK	United Kingdom

Cardinal points/directions are used unless otherwise stated.

SI units are used unless otherwise stated.

Document Information

Document History		
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