

International Maritime Organization (IMO)
Voluntary Member State Audit Scheme (VMSAS)

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Background

Since its foundation in 1959, IMO has been adopting and amending various Conventions and guidelines in relation to maritime safety and marine environment protection. The international community, however, has raised concerns over the effectiveness of the Conventions whenever a serious marine accident occurred, even though significant efforts have been made by IMO and its Member States to ensure safer and cleaner oceans. Moreover, despite strengthened restrictions on substandard vessels by Port State Control, they are still in operation with no sanctions in some areas of the world.

Through careful observation, IMO has found that the reasons for these phenomena were largely attributed to the inability of Contracting States, especially Flag States, in carrying out responsibilities and duties prescribed in the Conventions. It could be deemed as normal that Contracting States differ from one another in their ability to implement the Conventions.

IMO has made continuous efforts to provide developing nations with human and material resources through various technical cooperation funds in IMO with a view to overcoming these problems. Unfortunately, even through these technical cooperation programs, the IMO's goal for maritime safety and marine environment protection has never been satisfactorily realized, and naturally these facts has led IMO to suggest that Member States should adopt an audit system aimed at verifying the ability of each Member State to effectively implement IMO mandatory instruments.

Adoption of the VMSAS

As results of great endeavors by the FSI sub-committee, the Joint Working Group and

Maritime Safety Committee, IMO finally adopted the VMSAS at its 24th Assembly Session in December 2005. The two Assembly Resolutions that were adopted to provide guidance for the implementation of the VMSAS were the following:

- Code for the Implementation of Mandatory IMO Instruments (Res. A.973 (24))
- Framework and Procedures for the Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme (Res. A.974 (24))

At the conclusion of the 24th Assembly Session, IMO invited Member States to volunteer for audits and to nominate auditors. It is assumed that audits will commence during the latter part of the third quarter or the beginning of the fourth quarter of 2006, and that approximately 25 audits will be conducted during the biennium 2006-2007. It is also understood that an initial overall IMO audit timetable will be developed at the 96th session of the Council, to be held in June 2006.

The three main aspects that the audit scheme focuses on are; (1) the appropriateness of enacting national legislation for the IMO instruments, to which it is a Party; (2) the appropriateness of human and material resources for the implementation and enforcement of the applicable laws and regulations of the Member States; (3) the appropriateness of the delegation of Member State's authority to its recognized organizations including effective monitoring of its recognized organizations.

Preparations of the Republic of Korea for the VMSAS

From the early stages of discussions about the VMSAS in the IMO FSI Sub-committee, chaired by Captain Ki-Tack Lim, Korea has made a concerted effort to adopt the VMSAS with a view to promoting maritime safety.

Korea is actively preparing for the IMO audit in order to achieve successful results from the audit. For this purpose, last year Korea organized a task force team consisting of five members which takes exclusive responsibility for the VMSAS. Korea also reviewed its maritime safety management system in 2005. The review included the implementation status of the ten IMO mandatory instruments, analysis on the national law system, investigation on the actual condition of technical fields related to safety management, delegation of authority to recognized organizations, analysis on Flag State investigation and diagnosis on the organization for safety management.

During the review, experts from maritime fields identified a number of areas that need to be improved before the IMO audit.

- To enact or amend the national laws and regulations which have not incorporated respective international Conventions.
- To translate major national laws and regulations concerning maritime safety and marine environment protection into English.
- To introduce an ISO 9001:2000 quality management system for maritime safety management.
- To formulate or amend regulations concerning recruitment, qualification and training requirements for surveyors and other staff engaged in flag and port State duties.

Korea hopes to be audited by the IMO audit team in March 2007. To meet this timeline, Korea plans to carry out various tasks for the improvement of the safety management system to the end of this year.

- Amend four national laws and its subordinate decrees including the Ship Safety Act in accordance with 701 obligations for Flag, Port and Coastal State stipulated in the “Code for the Implementation of Mandatory IMO Instruments.”
- Recruit 36 qualified experts on maritime safety, including Port State Control officers, to secure observance of international rules and standards.
- Establish process-based safety management systems through the introduction of the ISO 9001:2000 quality management system.
- Conclude a formal written agreement with recognized organizations acting on behalf of the Administration to ensure the adequacy of work performed by the organizations.

Additionally, a preliminary audit intended to rectify possible flaws in the safety management system before the IMO audit was also recommended during the initial review. The audit would be conducted by a team of three auditors from different governments. Korea intends to be audited for five days during the third week of June 2006. For this preliminary audit, Korea is currently contacting foreign governments that are willing to share their experience and knowledge with regard to the VMSAS.

International Workshop on Maritime Safety

Korea hopes to hold an international workshop on maritime safety in Seoul, Korea from 10 to 11 October 2006. This workshop is aimed at bringing experts together in the field of maritime safety to share their valuable experience and exchange ideas with each other. Korea believes that this workshop would provide an opportunity to strengthen maritime safety and also accelerate mutual cooperation and understanding among maritime Administrations. The topics of the workshop will be; (1) IMO Voluntary Member State Audit Scheme; (2) Port State Control; (3) Marine Transportation Security. Asia-Pacific Maritime Safety Agencies are cordially invited to participate in this workshop. For further detailed information, participants are kindly requested to contact the following official.

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