



South African Maritime Safety Authority

Ref. SM 6/5/2/1

Date: 16 March 2020

Marine Notice No. 13 of 2020

CORONAVIRUS: VESSELS AND SEAFARERS

TO ALL REGIONAL MANAGERS, PRINCIPAL OFFICERS, SURVEYORS, VESSELS, SEAFARERS, SEAFARER PLACEMENT AGENCIES, SHIP MANAGERS, SHIP OWNERS, CLASSIFICATION SOCIETIES, SERVICE PROVIDERS AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS AND OTHER SAMS STAKEHOLDERS

Summary

This marine notice serves to inform all stakeholders that any Survey, Audit and/or Inspection is to be temporarily suspended until 30 March 2020, in terms of the Presidents National Disaster Declaration.

1. BACKGROUND

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. On 7 January 2020, the causative pathogen was identified as a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). The majority of these cases were linked to a seafood, poultry and live wildlife market in Wuhan City, suggesting that the novel coronavirus has a possible animal origin.

The current outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) disease has spread across several borders, which has prompted demands for the detection and management of suspected cases at points of entry (POE), including ports, airports and ground crossings. The coronavirus spreads through Human-to-human transmission via respiratory droplets or direct contact with an infected individual.

The news of the first confirmed Covid-19 case in South Africa, has stirred concern among South Africans who fear they too may fall victim to the deadly virus. South Africa is well prepared to respond to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and we are working with other government agencies to ensure that our response is consistent with government preventative measures.

Recognizing that, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19, the industry is facing challenges in meeting statutory requirements stipulated in the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC 2006) and other relevant IMO Conventions, SAMS has decided to provide guidance for dealing with the circumstances for example, extending seafarer periods of service onboard vessels, delaying periods for surveys, inspections and audits in a pragmatic and harmonized approach.

2. THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENTS NATIONAL DISASTER DECLARATION

As of 16 March 2020, all statutory surveys, audits and inspections will be suspended for a period of 14 days.

Dates: 16-30 March 2020

Vessel Owners are to carefully read the following sections, if there is any doubt, then please contact your local Port Office.

3. STATUTORY SURVEYS OF ALL TYPES OF VESSELS

Ships may face challenges in meeting applicable statutory requirements under various International Conventions, such as inability to renew ship's certification; unable to obtain dry docking services and unable to timely repatriate seafarers. To contain the spread of the virus, Classification Societies are also limiting their activities at the moment and may not be able to respond to survey requests. In all such cases, ship operators are to advise SAMSA.

When making survey bookings the vessel's Master to inform SAMSA of the vessel's itinerary for the past two weeks and if any crew changes have taken place during this time. If this has been the case, SAMSA to be provided with relevant information such as details of crew, countries of origin, transit and destination for these crew.

Further clarification may be required prior to our confirmation of attendance.

More importantly, we ask our stakeholders and clients to advise if there are any crew members onboard with symptoms associated with the virus, e.g. fever, sore throat, dry cough, shortness of breath and difficulty in breathing.

3.1 International Surveys/Audits

Where surveys are due on South African flagged vessels located overseas and it becomes difficult for attendance by a surveyor either SAMSA or an approved Recognised Organisation, SAMSA will consider the extension of mandatory statutory survey windows by issuance of an exemption beyond the expiry date of the statutory certificate (to delay the required survey of up to three months), on a case by case basis.

Vessel Masters are advised to apply for an extension to any Principal Officer in good time, before the expiry date to avoid Port State Control issues.

3.2 Ship Pre-Registration Surveys

Where a ship owner wishes to register a vessel on the South African Flag, and the vessel(s) are located overseas and it becomes difficult for attendance by a surveyor, SAMSA will allow an approved Recognised Organisation to conduct a Pre-Registration Survey on behalf of SAMSA and submit all relevant documentation to the Principal Officer of the proposed South African Port of Registry for evaluation and conditional approval.

3.3 Local Safety Surveys

SAMSA surveyors frequently travel to smaller fishing communities where there are no proper medical facilities in the area, other than a local clinic. SAMSA surveyors may therefore inadvertently spread the coronavirus to a local fishing community when visiting.

Vessels operating from these communities, whose safety certificates expire before 15 April 2020, may request an extension on their safety certificates for up to 60 days, subject to change.

In cases where Local General Safety Certificates (LGSC) are already expired, a re-issue of an LGSC will be considered on a case by case basis provided that the previous LGSC has not been expired for more than 60 days. To this end, payment for re-issue will need to be made.

3.4 Hull Surveys

Vessels whose hull survey is due before 15th April 2020 may request an extension on their hull certificate for up to 60 days, subject to change.

Vessels who are already booked to go up on a slip should confirm with the slip managers as to if they will still be accommodated. SAMSAs will attend provided that owner confirms that appropriate precautions have been taken.

3.5 Small vessel surveys with external SAMSAs appointed surveyors.

The decision as to if the survey will go ahead or not rests with the relevant appointed surveyor. Small vessel Certificates of Fitness may be extended for a period up to 60 days.

4. ALL SEAFARERS AND FISHERS

In the event of severe disruption, that limits access to SAMSAs premises or services (e.g., in the event of widespread quarantine), SAMSAs recommends applicants submit all their documents via email to the appropriate processing port. The SAMSAs Service Request Form, found on the SAMSAs website provides email addresses to the applicable local Port Office.

On receipt of digital copies of certification and ancillary documentation, SAMSAs will, providing the documents can be verified and authenticated, issue temporary certification for a duration of up to 6 months to enable continued service to be rendered by the certificate holder.

SAMSAs will process the electronic applications and replace the temporary certificates with permanent certificates. Delays to be expected.

4.1 Issue or Revalidation of a Certificate of Competency where a seafarer is unable to disembark a vessel

Seafarers should apply for issue or revalidation of certificates through e-mail to their local SAMSAs office via e-mail addresses found on SAMSAs website (<http://www.samsa.org.za/Pages/Contact-Us.aspx>)

Applications for revalidations made electronically to the relevant Port Office shall be acceptable, provided all documentation remains valid.

Applications for revalidations made electronically with documents that have exceeded their validity date, may be acceptable provided:

- a) the certificate was valid on/before 15 December 2020;
- b) the certificate shall be extended by no more than 12 months from date of revalidation
- c) a full fee shall be payable in each instance of application.

4.2 Seafarers who are onboard vessel beyond their contracts for reasons connected with the Covid-19 virus.

The company should ensure that the seafarers are kept informed of the risks of infection, reasons as to why they are required to stay on board, any measures being taken is for their protection, and arrangements for their repatriation. A valid Seafarers Employment Agreement (SEA) must remain in force until repatriation. If any of the Seafarer Employment Agreements have expired, they must be extended, or new ones issued. The company needs to ensure that the seafarers are sent home at the first available opportunity. Evidence should be retained by both the seafarer and the company clearly demonstrating the reason why the seafarer was asked to extend their contract.

4.3 Level 3 Assessments

These will be assessed on a case by case basis by the Principal Officer based on the risk of exposure as provided by the incumbent with regards to local and international travel from high risk countries and/or areas.

4.4 Eyesight Tests

These will be temporarily suspended for 14 days.

- Revalidation applications will be accepted on presentation of a statement from a registered optometrist listing the results of the letter (form) test.

- Initial applications for Certificates of Proficiency should be accompanied by statement from a registered optometrist listing the results of the letter (form) test and result of a colour vision assessment (confirmation that there is no green/red deficiency).
- Pilot Exemption – Current holders of pilot exemption certificates may have their SAMSA eyesight certificates extended for a period of 60 days.
- Level 3 assessment applications may be submitted without a valid eyesight certificate. A valid eyesight certificate will need to be presented at the time of the Level 3 assessment.

4.5 Training Institutions

Accredited training providers are required to review the planned training and put in place measures to prevent contact between students, facilitators and staff.

Training institutions holding both SAMSA accreditation registered with Department of Higher Education (DHED) should take guidance from the DHED in terms of suspension of classes.

For other training institutions presenting SAMSA accredited courses only, all courses that requires contact between students shall, with immediate effect, be cancelled until after Easter and only those already underway may be completed.

Where an accreditation is due for renewal, an application form for service shall be lodged with the appropriate office where a six months extension will be granted upon receipt of such application. New applications will be reviewed until the point where an audit is required where the process will be paused until SAMSA personnel are permitted to conduct such audits.

4.6 Safe Manning of Ships

Ship operators shall inform SAMSA regarding any challenges with seafarers holding foreign certificates of competency with regards to revalidation and obtaining an endorsement to their Certificate of Competency. SAMSA will not issue an endorsement to a foreign COC unless such certificate is still valid, except where there is a clear policy form that administration regarding the same. The issue of the endorsement applied for by employers is not affected by this Marine Notice.

4.7 Shipowner liability

If in doubt, shipping companies should contact their P&I Insurer to confirm that insurance or other financial security is in place for additional costs pending repatriation (e.g. isolation), medical care, and any costs and expenses of crew transfer for suspected cases. Under the Merchant Shipping Act, MLC and C188; provisions relating to repatriation and medical care – shipowners/managers remain liable for costs pending repatriation (e.g. isolation), medical care, and any costs or expenses of crew transfer for suspected cases, as prescribed by the various instruments.

5. CREW CHANGES

Where possible, ship owners / ship managers should avoid foreign crew changes in South African ports. If crew changes are unavoidable, ship owners / ship managers should be guided by the local Ship's Agent. If foreign crew members are travelling to South Africa, ship owners / ship managers should adhere to the National requirements at the time of travel. If foreign crew members are travelling from South Africa, the Ship Agent should see guidance from the local Port Health, Customs and Immigration Officials in how best to transfer these crew members from the vessel to the airport.

In terms of local South African vessels, ship owners / ship managers, should follow the guidance of the local Port Health, Customs and Immigration Officials.

Seafarers should be treated as per normal, following the requirements of the Merchant Shipping Act, Maritime Labour Convention and the Work in Fishing Convention (C188), with due regard to their welfare.

Should any ship owner / ship manager have any queries, they should contact the local port office for more information.

Ship Owners / Ship Managers should familiarise themselves with South Africa's national requirements and keep up to date with the latest developments. Each ship owner / ship manager is obliged to evaluate the risk to their vessels and crew and formulate a Risk Assessment to enable a Company wide response.

Seafarers should be treated humanely and not unfairly.

6. SHIP AGENTS

Ship Agents should familiarise themselves with the national requirements in terms of crew changes, bunkering, victuals, stores and ship spares, in order to provide clear guidance to any ship owner / ship manager.

7. PORT OFFICE: WALK-IN SERVICE REQUESTS

SAMSA request all stakeholder to interact with local Port Office's as a walk-in client only when absolutely necessary. Refrain from bringing family, friends and children to the Port Office. The use of telephone communication and email correspondence are strongly encouraged due to the shortage of hand-sanitisers, masks and gloves. A distance of at least 1-2 meters must be maintained at all times.

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