

Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse on Board Ship

July 2017



Introduction

The trafficking and use of illegal drugs is an area of concern that affects safety and security in the maritime world. The most recent United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) World Drug Report shows a continued increasing trend in the estimated number of persons who use drugs. Weekly news reports and evidence from official sources demonstrate that ships in ports around the globe are, more than ever, being used in trafficking operations. The need to protect both seafarers and passengers from drug abuse and the criminal menace of drug trafficking is paramount.

This article summarises some of the issues for onboard operations, as well as ideas and potential solutions for incorporation within a company's SMS. The use of training and the availability of further guidance is highlighted.

Abuse and Trafficking

The two principal vulnerabilities of shipping regarding drugs are:

1. Direct involvement of crew members or passengers in drug use
2. The concealment and trafficking of illegal drugs, which impacts on the ship's safety and security and the welfare of all on board.

Drug trafficking occurs in ports and on ships all over the world. The maritime route is one of the principal methods of moving illegal drugs across borders, regardless of ship type, cargo type, location and destination. Trafficking may occur without the knowledge of those on a ship or in a port, or they may be complicit in the activity. Drug trafficking violates national laws in most of the world's States and the subsequent drug sales help to fund crime and terrorism.

Drug trafficking and recreational drug use by a seafarer or passenger pose a direct risk to the safety of other personnel on board and expose the shipowner and Master to serious repercussions. These are principally financial, but can also involve significant delay and on occasion criminal prosecution and/or ship detention.

Shipowners and operators need to minimise the likelihood of trafficking on their ships by preparing and protecting their ships and staff through adequate training and the provision of information, including how to respond to drug abuse or discovery of illegal drugs on board.

Onboard drills should be held to highlight:

- Responsibilities during gangway watches
- search procedures for stores, deliveries, cargoes and around the ship
- response to drug discoveries and suspicious items
- response to signs of drugs abuse by passengers or crew.

Solutions

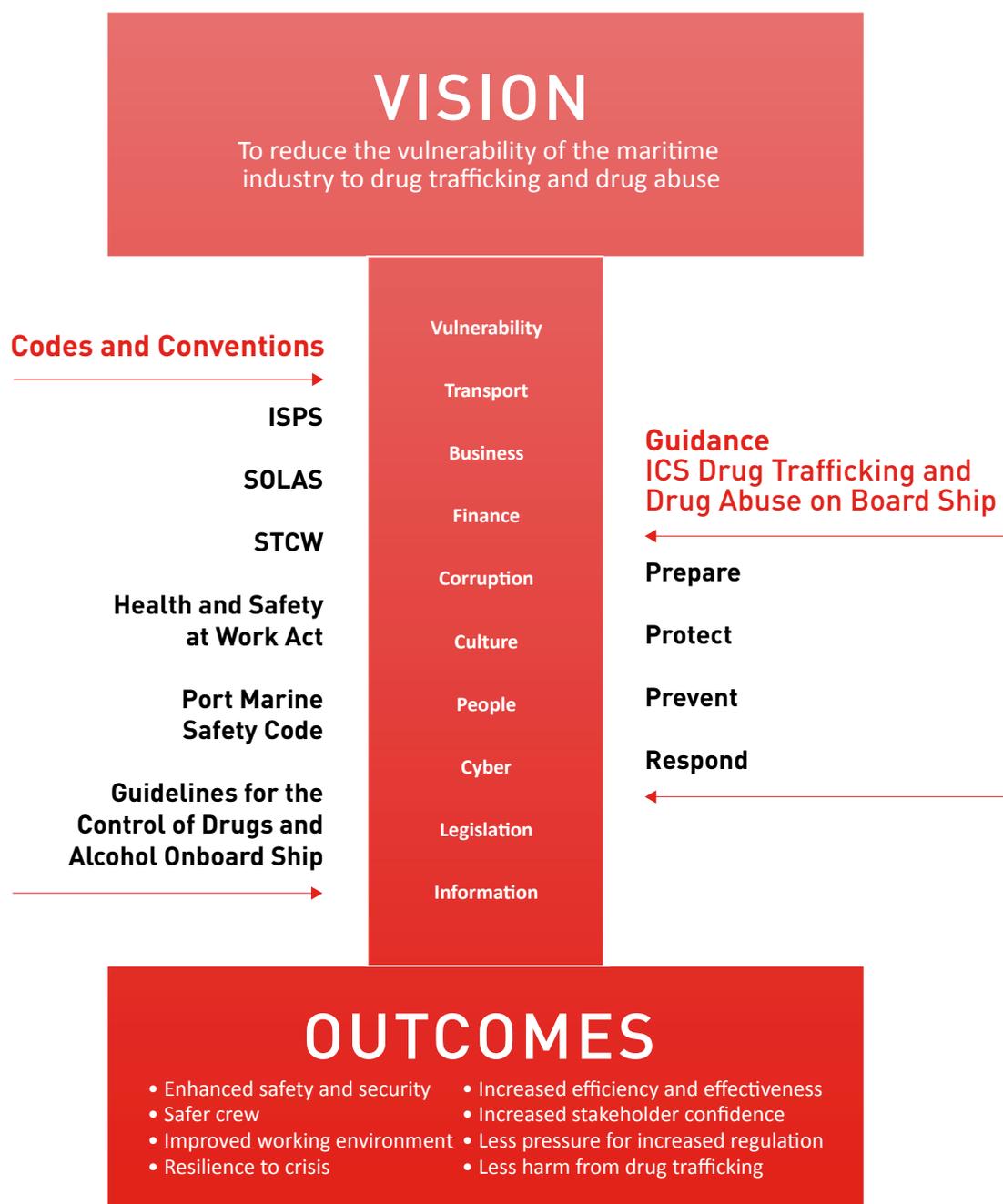
Ships are advised to incorporate a drug strategy in their day-to-day operations, principally by establishing procedures within the company safety management system (SMS). These should consider the following stages:



A thorough and detailed security strategy, in compliance with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code requires consideration of the threat to the ship imposed by drugs. Drugs may come on board in various ways:

- In sealed cargo, e.g. containers, loaded directly from ashore
- in stores or deliveries, e.g. provisions and spares
- directly from persons, including visitors, officials, trespassers and ship's staff
- without the knowledge of others, including by attachment to the hull or rudder of the ship.

Company and ship drug procedures should cover these vulnerabilities and also ensure regulatory compliance with the relevant conventions, codes and national/local legislation. The aim is to reduce the vulnerability of the ship, and by that extension the maritime industry, to drug trafficking and drug abuse, as shown in the Information Map below:



Procedures should contain guidance and checklists for Masters and officers to deal with drug abuse on board, as well as to prevent and protect the ship against trafficking. These include, but are not limited to:

- Consideration of increased precautions in high risk ports, or in the case of an escalation of the ISPS level where a direct threat is perceived
- Knowing the crew’s usual habits and recognising any unease or departure from routine, such as appearing in unusual places on board or any uncharacteristic behaviour
- Maintaining a proper gangway watch at all times in port and preventing unauthorised access
- conducting regular inspections of a varied nature, place and duration
- escorting all visitors and arranging supervision of shore gangs
- locking all spaces and access points to, for example, cargo spaces not regularly in use, and restricting issue of keys.

The IMO recommends that the following factors are taken into account in port, when determining the likelihood of illegal drugs being trafficked:

- Ports of call and routes taken by the vessel
- the origin and routing of the cargo
- the level of control exercised at port facilities
- the degree of control over access to the ship
- the vulnerability of the crew to pressure by drug traffickers.

While at sea and when transiting known drug regions, all seafarers should be vigilant to ensure persons do not attempt to board the ship or place illegal drugs in spaces on the ship. The Master should ensure that frequent inspections of the entire ship, as well as the normal weekly inspection, are carried out diligently to prevent illegal drugs being trafficked from port to port.

Guidance

Further guidance can be obtained from a variety of sources, including:

- Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse on Board Ship, 4th Edition, 2017 – International Chamber of Shipping. Published by the Witherby Publishing Group
- International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS Code), 2004 – International Maritime Organization (IMO)
- Code of Practice for Security in Ports, 2003 – IMO and International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Programmes in the Maritime Industry (A Manual for Planners), 2001 – ILO
- The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW Convention and Code), 1978 – IMO
- Guidelines for the Control of Drugs and Alcohol Onboard Ship, 1995 – OCIMF
- Drug Abuse at Sea, 2014 – The Shipowner's Club.



INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF SHIPPING

Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse On Board Ship
Guidelines for Owners and Masters on Preparation, Prevention, Protection and Response
Fourth Edition – 2017

These guidelines assist shipping companies and their Masters and officers to combat drug smuggling and to recognise some of the signs of drug dependence among crew members.

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Harry Harris
Technical Advisor
Marine Compliance & Regulations
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