



TECHNICAL CIRCULAR No. 324 of 01<sup>st</sup> March 2016

To:	All Surveyors/Auditors
Applicable to flag:	All Flags
Subject:	<b>Preparing the Crew for an Audit</b>
Reference:	ISM Code

### Preparing the Crew for an Audit

As the United States Coast Guard 46 CFR Subchapter “M” looms on the horizon, and the updated American Waterways Operators - Responsible Carrier Program (AWO-RCP) requirements are in hand, many more mariners will be subjected to an “audit”, which is totally different from an inspection. Inspections are black and white, no gray area to navigate or fog to creep through; it is what it is – the station bill is either posted or not. On the other hand, an audit may deviate from the plan, which is normally created by the auditor, and depending on discovery during the audit, may take a different direction altogether than the original audit scope to dig deeper in a particular area. Case in point, the auditor boards the vessel and conducts the opening meeting stating that they are here to audit the effectiveness of your Safety Management System (SMS). Okay, you are ready, bring it on. The first question which you have been prepped for is “Where is your Safety and Environmental Protection Policy posted?” “Oh” you say with a smile (got this one in the bag), “it is right here on the wall in the galley, signed by top management.” You walk over and show the auditor and the auditor gives it a good look, checks the revision number and date, compares it with your SMS Manual, and then asks: “what does this mean to you?” “Huh, what do you mean?” you say, feeling like now things are starting to turn in the wrong direction and you need to come up with some answer about what it “means to me.” You start worrying about whether or not you will say the right thing and if not, how will it impact the audit, which perhaps will be judged by your boss. You were not prepared to answer

#### Customer Service Center

5201 Blue Lagoon Drive, 9<sup>TH</sup>. Floor,  
Miami, Fl., 33126  
Tel: 1 (305) 716 4116,  
Fax: 1 (305) 716 4117,  
E-Mail:

[joel@conarinagroup.com](mailto:joel@conarinagroup.com)

#### Technical Head Office

7111 Dekadine Ct.  
Spring, Tx., 77379  
Tel: 1 (832) 451 0185,  
1 (713) 204 6380

E-Mail: [cbozenovici@vcmaritime.com](mailto:cbozenovici@vcmaritime.com)

these types of open ended questions and formulate an opinion about “what it means to me” on the spot. From that point forward the audit can end up being a dreaded experience of unknowns without safeguards or controls as to where the conversation may go. Instead of a good experience, it turns into a most unwelcomed event.

To help with this process and ensure a positive outcome, it might be valuable to not only provide good auditor training to your internal auditing team, but to also train those who are on the receiving end of the audit. Areas to cover might include: what does an audit mean, what is the purpose of the audit, do you need to know the answer by rote memory or can you look up the answer in the SMS Manual; is it an “open book test”? Not only will this help to alleviate potential stress, but it will also promote goodwill and provide an opportunity to clue the crew in as to why the audit is beneficial and an opportunity for the company to measure its own performance as to whether or not the crew fully understands and values their SMS.

This training can be delivered and integrated during the internal audit itself and approached as a team-building opportunity on how to achieve operational excellence together versus a fact finding mission of whether or not the vessel/crew/company are in compliance. The team-building approach tends to yield much more than just a score card of compliance, some of these outcomes include: increased employee engagement, motivation and performance towards continual improvement.

One subject area and skill to consider weaving into an existing curriculum or as a standalone training tool to help crew and auditors alike prepare for these audits is “critical thinking.” Critical thinking helps to objectify the process versus making it personal and subjective. In the example above, the auditor asked “What does the Safety and Environmental Protection Policy mean to you?” A critical thinking person would set aside uncomfortable “feelings” of not knowing the answer and think critically about the question to find a solution. Possibly, through a quick and simple analysis, reverse engineer the title, resulting in an answer like: “It is the company’s policy for our safety and the protection of the environment.”

Internal auditor training and training for the person being audited not only prepares your auditors and crews for this important function, but it also provides an excellent opportunity to introduce,

**Customer Service Center**

5201 Blue Lagoon Drive, 9<sup>TH</sup>. Floor,  
Miami, Fl., 33126  
Tel: 1 (305) 716 4116,  
Fax: 1 (305) 716 4117,  
E-Mail:

[joel@conarinagroup.com](mailto:joel@conarinagroup.com)

**Technical Head Office**

7111 Dekadine Ct.  
Spring, Tx., 77379  
Tel: 1 (832) 451 0185,  
1 (713) 204 6380

E-Mail: [cbozenovici@vcmaritime.com](mailto:cbozenovici@vcmaritime.com)

learn, and practice the skills of team-building and critical thinking. The more you can set the team up for success before and even during the audit, the more positive the outcome will be and hopefully result in everyone being more connected to what you are trying to ultimately achieve.

REFERENCES:

- **ISM Code**

ATTACHMENTS: No.

Kindest Regards,  
Cosmin Bozenovici  
Naval Architect – Conarina Technical Head Office

**Customer Service Center**

5201 Blue Lagoon Drive, 9<sup>TH</sup>. Floor,  
Miami, Fl., 33126  
Tel: 1 (305) 716 4116,  
Fax: 1 (305) 716 4117,  
E-Mail:

[joel@conarinagroup.com](mailto:joel@conarinagroup.com)

**Technical Head Office**

7111 Dekadine Ct.  
Spring, Tx., 77379  
Tel: 1 (832) 451 0185,  
1 (713) 204 6380

E-Mail: [cbozenovici@vcmaritime.com](mailto:cbozenovici@vcmaritime.com)