

## IMO moves to amend SOLAS requiring reporting containers lost at sea

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The Maritime Safety Committee of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has moved a step closer in its efforts to institute mandatory reporting requirements for containers lost overboard.

The most recent focus on the safety issues related to lost containers and the need for reporting requirements, as well as efforts to reduce the loss of containers, started at the May 2021 meeting of the Safety Committee in response to a rash of container accidents.

The IMO's Sub-Committee on Carriage of Cargoes and Containers agreed to a draft of new requirements for mandatory reporting of lost freight containers at sea during its most recent meeting, which concluded last week. Highlighting the serious hazard to navigation and safety at sea in general, and in particular to recreational sailing vessels, fishing vessels, and other small craft, the Sub-Committee set out a specific set of amendments to the SOLAS and MARPOL treaties.

In May 2021 when the Maritime Safety Committee agreed to initiate new measures to detect and report containers lost at sea. The Committee sought to define the scope of the problem by emphasizing the growth in container shipping and the sheer volume of containers at sea at any given time.

There are roughly 6,500 containerships currently active, with a combined capacity of nearly 26m teu, according to industry estimates.

In 2019, the World Shipping Council (WSC) reported that the international liner shipping industry transported approximately 226 million containers, with cargo transported valued at more than \$4trn.

While the WSC estimated an average total of 1,382 containers were lost at sea each year in the 12 years of 2008 to 2019, an unusually high number of weather-related incidents especially in the winter of 2020-2021 drove the averages higher. The WSC calculated that in 2020-2021 the average was over 3,100 containers lost each year.

The draft amendments to SOLAS chapter V add new paragraphs specifically addressing danger messages. They would require the master of every ship

involved in the loss of freight containers to communicate the particulars of such an incident by appropriate means without delay and to the fullest extent possible to ships in the vicinity, to the nearest coastal State, and also to the flag State. The flag State would be required to report the loss of containers to the IMO.

Among the other provisions is a requirement to report the position and number of containers. Specific clauses focus on the reporting of hazardous materials that might be in the containers.

The drafts next move for approval at the spring 2023 meeting of the full maritime safety committee followed by adoption at the meeting in the fall of 2023. The Sub-Committee agreed that the draft amendments should enter into force on January 1, 2026, and the IMO Secretariat will develop the relevant module under the IMO Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS) for the receipt of reports from flag States.