

Foreword: BC Code, 2004

For more than 100 years cargoes have been shipped in bulk. However, in recent years there has been an increased variation in bulk cargoes carried by sea, which now constitute a significant proportion of international seaborne trade.

Millions of tonnes of cargoes – such as coals, concentrates, grains, fertilizers, animal foodstuffs, minerals and ores – are shipped in bulk by sea every year. While the vast majority of these shipments are made without incident, there have been a number of serious casualties, which resulted, not only in the loss of the ship, but also in loss of life.

The problems involved in the carriage of bulk cargoes were recognized by the delegates to the 1960 International Conference on Safety of Life at Sea, but at that time, it was not possible to frame detailed requirements except for the carriage of grain cargoes. The Conference did recommend, however, in paragraph 55 of Annex D to the Convention, that an internationally acceptable code of safe practice for the shipment of bulk cargoes should be drawn up under the sponsorship of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). This work was undertaken by the Organization's Sub-Committee on Containers and Cargoes and several editions of the Code of Safe Practice for Solid Bulk Cargoes (BC Code) have been published since the first one appeared in 1965.

Chapter VI of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea 1974 governs the carriage of solid bulk cargoes, and was amended in 1994 to extend the scope of the chapter, to include bulk cargoes other than grain. The revised chapter that entered into force in 1994 included provisions for regulating the carriage of solid bulk cargoes. Chapter VII of the Convention governs the carriage of dangerous goods and includes provisions relating to dangerous goods carried in bulk.

Detailed fire protection arrangements for ships carrying solid bulk cargoes are incorporated into chapter II-2 of the SOLAS Convention by regulations 10 and 19. Attention is drawn to regulation II-2/19.4 (or II-2/54.3) of the SOLAS Convention as amended, which provides for a Document of Compliance to be issued to ships transporting bulk dangerous goods, as defined in regulation VII/1.1 of the Convention and in the IMDG Code, except class 6.2 and class 7, which are:

- cargo ships of 500 gross tonnage or over constructed on or after 1 September 1984; or
- cargo ships of less than 500 gross tonnage constructed on or after 1 February 1992.

The BC Code itself provides guidance to Administrations, ship owners, shippers and masters on the standards to be applied in the safe stowage and shipment of solid bulk cargoes excluding grain, which is dealt with under separate rules. The BC Code includes practical guidance on the procedures to be followed and the appropriate precautions to be taken in the loading, trimming, carriage and discharge of bulk cargoes. The current edition includes all amendments to the BC Code that were adopted by the Maritime Safety Committee at its seventy-ninth session by resolution MSC.193(79).

The major changes that have been adopted are the following:

- Appendices A, B and C have been replaced by individual schedules for each cargo in appendix 1. Cargoes that were listed in appendices A, B or C are now identified by Groups A, B or C in each schedule.
- Appendices D to G have been renumbered.

The BC Code contains recommendations for entering enclosed spaces aboard ships, which are contained in appendix 7.

The list of solid bulk cargoes appearing in the BC Code is by no means exhaustive, and the physical or chemical properties attributed to them are intended only for guidance. Therefore, before loading any solid bulk cargo it is essential to ascertain – usually from the shipper – the current physical characteristics and chemical properties of the cargo. In circumstances where, consultation with the competent authority is required prior to bulk shipment of cargoes, it is equally important to consult authorities at the ports of loading and discharge concerning requirements which may be in force.

Other information to assist persons responsible for the loading and unloading of solid bulk cargoes is contained in recommendations published by the Organization.¹

Since valuable information leading to improvements in this Code may be obtained from voyage reports, it is recommended that the master notifies his Administration of the behaviour of various types of solid bulk cargoes and, in particular, reports any incidents involving such cargoes.

The BC Code is recommended to Governments for adoption or for use as the basis for national regulations in pursuance of their obligations under chapters VI and VII of the 1974 SOLAS Convention, as amended. Member States that adopt the Code as a basis for national regulations are invited to advise the Organization accordingly.

¹ Refer to the Code of practice for the safe loading and unloading of bulk carriers, adopted by the Organization by resolution A.862(20).