Anchoring – Operational Safety — study guide

Anchoring is a routine operation with its own hazards: heavy chain, weather, other traffic and the environment itself. This guide covers the equipment, the team, the precautions and the reasons a ship anchors.[1][2]

Chain and anchors

Each joining shackle is located at a length of **27.5 metres** of chain (one shackle of cable). A standard seagoing ship has two anchors so it can moor in a more secure position and to provide a backup to the main anchor. Running both anchors at once is avoided because the chains can get twisted together.

Command and the team

The **Master** has overall command and guides the bridge and engine room team. The Master does **not** normally act as the watchkeeper. New personnel should only operate the equipment under strict supervision from a competent person.

Watchkeeping

As a minimum, the watchkeeper must ensure that environmental conditions are observed, that measures are in place to protect the environment from pollution by the ship, and that there is an accurate perception of the ship's position.

The toolbox talk

A toolbox talk typically covers the communications channel to be used, who has overall command of the operation, the required PPE, and the reason for going to anchor together with the expected duration.

Minimum PPE

At all times, as a minimum, wear eye protection or safety spectacles, steel-toecap boots or shoes, a hard hat with a chinstrap, and a boilersuit.

Anchoring in inclement weather

Wear the correct PPE and clothing to protect personnel from the elements as far as possible, confirm at the toolbox-talk stage that everyone is aware of the weather and the unexpected movements the ship can make, and keep a lookout for ships and hazards — reporting immediately if a sound signal is heard.

Safety-critical items and regulation

Safety-critical items include emergency generators and steering gear, life-saving appliances, and firefighting equipment. The International Safety Management (ISM) Code is mandatory for all commercial ships over 500 gross tonnes.[1]

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Reasons to anchor

A ship might anchor for a long-term layup during an industry downturn, to wait for a berth to become clear, in a sheltered area to fix a problem on board, or off port limits.

Key facts to remember

- Joining shackle every 27.5 m of chain. Two anchors = more secure mooring + backup; don't run both (chains twist).
- Master has overall command; the Master does not normally stand the watch.
- Watchkeeper: observe the environment, prevent pollution, keep an accurate position.
- Toolbox talk: comms channel, command, PPE, reason and expected duration.
- Minimum PPE: eye protection, steel-toecap boots, hard hat with chinstrap, boilersuit.
- Safety-critical: emergency generators/steering gear, LSA, firefighting equipment.
- ISM Code mandatory over 500 GT; new personnel only under competent supervision.

Sources

1. SOLAS Chapter IX — International Safety Management (ISM) Code (application to ships over 500 gross tonnage).
2. SOLAS and the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers (COSWP) — anchoring, watchkeeping, PPE and pollution prevention.