Engine Room Safety — study guide

Working in the engine room exposes you to heat, noise, moving machinery and fire risk. This guide covers the routine precautions that prevent the most common accidents.[1]

Housekeeping (slips, trips and falls)

Most engine-room injuries don't come from machines — they come from the floor. Keep walkways clear, coil and route cables instead of trailing them, and clean spills the moment they happen. Replace floor plates and covers after work, put barriers around open floor openings, and keep waste segregated and disposed of in the correct streams.[1][2]

Hot surfaces

Unlagged exhausts and turbocharger housings run hot enough to burn on contact, as do uninsulated steam and fuel lines. Lagged (insulated) pipes are protected precisely so you don't burn on them. Routine contact points — ladders, handrails, emergency exits — are not hot.[1]

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

For normal engine-room work you need safety gloves, safety glasses or goggles, a hard hat, coveralls and ear defenders.[1][3] Immersion suits and life jackets belong to abandon-ship stations, not routine engine-room work.[5]

Escape routes

Know both escape routes from every space you work in, and keep them clear. An escape route blocked by stores or equipment is not an escape route.[4]

Fire prevention

Clean up spills immediately, keep bilges as free of oil and water as reasonably practicable, and never store combustible materials near a source of ignition — oily rags on a hot surface are a classic fire. Signed barriers and warning notices exist to be obeyed, not ignored.[4]

Key facts to remember

- Keep the floor clear; clean spills at once.
- Exhausts and turbo housings are hot; lagged pipes are insulated.
- Engine-room PPE: gloves, goggles, hard hat, coveralls, ear defenders.
- Know both escape routes and keep them clear.
- Keep bilges free of oil and keep combustibles away from ignition.

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Sources

1. Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers (COSWP) — Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).
2. MARPOL Annex V — Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships (IMO).
3. STCW Convention and Code, Section A-VI/1 — Personal survival techniques and fire prevention/fire fighting.
4. SOLAS Chapter II-2 — Fire protection, fire detection and fire extinction, including Regulation 13 (means of escape).
5. SOLAS Chapter III and the LSA Code — Life-saving appliances and arrangements.