Port State Control — study guide

Port State Control (PSC) is how a port checks that a foreign ship meets international standards before it is allowed to trade. This guide covers the inspector, the risk categories, the exemptions and how to conduct yourself during an inspection.[1]

The inspection

A Port State Control inspection is carried out by a **Port State Control Officer (PSCO)**. **STCW** stands for the International Convention on Standards on Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers. The claim that more than **50,000** inspections are carried out annually on foreign ships in Paris MOU ports is **false**. A notice of national appeal can be found on the reverse side of the detention notice form and is of a similar format in all Paris MOU member states.

Risk categories (Paris MOU)

- **High Risk Ships (HRS)** — inspected between 5 and 6 months after the last inspection.
- **Standard Risk Ships (SRS)** — between 10 and 12 months after the last inspection.
- **Low Risk Ships (LRS)** — between 24 and 36 months after the last inspection.

Exemptions

Ships exempt from PSC inspections include fishing vessels, naval auxiliaries, and pleasure yachts that are not trading.

What leads to a more detailed inspection

Findings that may lead to a more detailed inspection include indications that key personnel may not be able to communicate with each other or with others on board; the absence of principal equipment required on board; sending false distress alerts without following the correct cancellation procedures; and evidence that the Master or crew are not familiar with essential shipboard operations.

Conduct during inspection

The crew should follow the inspection with their full attention, address the PSCO with respect at all times, and present any issues — with the necessary corrective measures — at the beginning of the inspection, to avoid the PSCO raising them first. The PSCO, in turn, should seek advice if unsure of findings, ensure findings and corrective actions are explained clearly and that the report is understood by the Master, and advise the Master of the complaints procedure if a disagreement cannot be resolved within a reasonable period. The **Paris MOU code of conduct** is built on three principles: integrity (moral soundness, honesty and freedom from corrupting influences), professionalism (applying accepted professional standards of conduct and technical knowledge), and transparency (openness and accountability).

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Key facts to remember

- Inspections by a PSCO; STCW = Training, Certification and Watchkeeping convention.
- Paris MOU intervals: HRS 5–6 months, SRS 10–12 months, LRS 24–36 months.
- Exempt: fishing vessels, naval auxiliaries, non-trading pleasure yachts.
- Detailed-inspection triggers: poor communication between key personnel, missing principal equipment, uncancelled false distress alerts, unfamiliarity with essential operations.
- Conduct: follow attentively, be respectful, raise issues with corrective measures up front.
- Code of conduct: integrity, professionalism, transparency.

Sources

1. IMO Procedures for Port State Control and the Paris MOU — inspection regime, risk categories and code of conduct.
2. SOLAS, MARPOL and STCW — the conventions a Port State Control inspection verifies.