



CLASSIFICATION SOCIETIES



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Warning

This document provides an introduction to Classification Societies. For detailed advice it is necessary to refer to the latest versions of documentation produced by and about Classification Societies and read this in conjunction with the relevant national and international legislation.

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First Published 1993

ICHCA International BP4

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ISBN 10: 1 85330 006 3

ISBN 13: 978-1-85330-006-6

Revision 2

Published 2004

1. | WHAT IS A CLASSIFICATION SOCIETY?

A Classification Society makes comprehensive Classification rules for hull structural design and essential shipboard engineering systems and applies them by means of appraisal of the design and survey of the ship and its systems. Compliance with the rules entitles a ship to be "classed".

A Classification Society's main purpose is to ensure the continued seaworthiness of all ships "classed" under its Rules. There is no statutory requirement for ships to be "classed", although it is usually a requirement of marine insurance. It is at the owner's discretion as to whether his ship is built and maintained to Classification Society Rules. Owners whose ships are "classed" but fail to maintain the required standards cannot be penalised and the only action that the Classification Society can take is to suspend or cancel that ship's "class".

2. | HOW IS IT ORGANISED?

Each Society is managed by a Committee that usually consists of representatives from all branches of the shipping industry. It maintains offices or agents in all the major ports and shipbuilding areas of the world with qualified surveyors available to carry out the required surveys.

3. | HOW DID THE SOCIETIES ORIGINATE?

The first Classification Society, Lloyd's Register of Shipping, was formed in 1734 after insurance underwriters had been meeting in Edward Lloyd's coffee shop in London. It had, as its first customers, a group of marine underwriters who were being asked to insure ships of which they knew little or nothing. They decided to produce a register of shipping as a guide to the assessment of maritime risks and employed retired masters as surveyors to inspect the ships. The earliest known register was published in 1764 and, amongst, other ship details, the general condition of the ship was clearly indicated.

Lloyds started to use annotations to indicate the ship's condition and decided that A1 would be indicative of the highest class. In the days of wooden sailing ships, classification was assigned to the ship for a specified number of years; thus, 7A1 meant that the ship remained in that class for seven years. The current classification 100A1 was first used about 1870 when iron ships appeared and indicated at the time that it was thought that they would last for at least 100 years.

Although it was underwriters who took the initiative in setting up a system of ship classification, shipowners and merchants soon realised its advantages from their respective points of view. The first Rules were published in 1834.

4. | INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Bureau Veritas, the French classification society originally formed by three Antwerp underwriters, was established in 1828 and in the 1860's four more Classification Societies were formed (Registro Italiano Navale, American Bureau of Shipping, Det Norske Veritas and Germanischer Lloyd). The Japanese Society, Nippon Kaiji Kyokai, was formed in 1899. Today, there are some 46 Classification Societies based around the world.

5. | WHAT DO CLASSIFICATION SOCIETIES DO TODAY?

Many Classification Societies are now involved in work additional to that described above. This includes various statutory and advisory work (see below) and on-board lifting plant - both cargo and engine room.

The leading Classification Societies are members of the International Association of Classification Societies (see below).

6. | ADDITIONAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY CLASSIFICATION SOCIETIES

6.1. Statutory Services

Many Classification Societies are authorised by many Governments to carry out statutory work on their behalf. In the main this involves the application of various International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Conventions and issuance of the appropriate certification. Many are also authorised to apply various requirements of Conventions of the International Labour Office (ILO) (see Briefing Pamphlet No. 1). The cargo lifting plant standards are based upon an ILO Convention.

6.2. Research and development

To ensure that the rules within which the Societies work are technically sound and are kept up-to-date, the Classification Societies put great emphasis on research and development and on specific tasks aimed at solutions related to specific constructions or potential risk areas.

For example, such work has enabled Societies to develop mathematical models of ship gantry cranes in order that in-service problems, such as the development of structural cracks, can be identified and remedies found.

6.3. Technical advisory Services

Many Societies offer a range of technical advisory services; in particular, advice on Conventions, surveys and certification, vibration and noise assessment, ship manoeuvring characteristics, contingency planning, hull and performance monitoring, ocean towage and mooring and long-term anchoring performance assessment.

7. | CLASSIFICATION SOCIETIES AND CARGO HANDLING

The work of the Societies has had in increasing relevance to cargo handling operations over the past few years. Not only have the traditional areas of involvement continued but Societies have become concerned with freight container construction, maintenance, inspection and certification and, more recently, application of ISO 9002 - quality control (a standard which many organisations in the transportation chain are seeking to achieve and maintain), and IMO Resolution A.647 (16) - Guidelines on Management for the Safe Operation of Ships and for Pollution Prevention.

However, it is likely that the main relevance of Classification Societies to marine cargo handling continues to be with shipborne access and lifting plant. Thus, when a port/stevedoring company preparing to load or discharge a ship using ships lifting plant looks at the ship's gear register or documents, as part of that preparation, it is highly likely that the tests and thorough examinations and the certificates which go with them for the derricks, cranes, cargo lifts etc will conform to ILO Convention 152 and will have been signed by a surveyor employed by one of IACS's member Societies.

The stevedore is concerned with the condition of the lifting plant at this particular time. Thus, whilst the diligence and expertise of the Societies and their surveyors at the time of carrying out tests and thorough examinations is important, the condition of ships lifting plant can deteriorate afterwards. Experience has shown that prevention of deterioration is largely dependent upon regular satisfactory maintenance being carried out. This emphasises the need for visual examination of the lifting plant before use.

8. | PORTS/TERMINALS AND CLASSIFICATION SOCIETIES

The Societies for the most part carry out work which is paid for by shipowners and this has led, in the intensely competitive environment in which classing and regular examinations are carried out, to accusations of conflict of interest as far as the Societies are concerned. Furthermore, there have been allegations that standards have been allowed to fall. The term "sub-standard ships" does not only apply to fitness of the ship to carry cargo and to embark upon sea voyages, but can affect cargo handling as well.

The Societies, however, deny that such a conflict exists in reality and strongly maintain that their impartiality has been and continues to be upheld. They also believe that general standards of inspection have not been eroded, and say that few actual detailed complaints are in fact ever made and that its members continue to have, as a major commitment, the upholding of standards in relation to ships lifting plant and equipment. The IACS Quality System Certification Scheme (below) is given as evidence of that.

For those who are concerned with cargo handling, therefore, the presence of a signature and stamp on the relevant ship's documents from one of the Societies within membership of IACS should mean in essence that a large, well organised and technically competent organisation is behind it and that the relevant test/examination has been carried out to a suitable standard to ensure that, subject to adequate maintenance, cargo handling safety can be assured.

Should any instances occur where there is any reason to doubt that the appropriate documents or the ships plant condition they certify are satisfactory, it is recommended that, in addition to contacting the local maritime administration (which is usually required by law), contact should be made with the head office of the Classification Society concerned. For their part, they would welcome such approaches as part of their efforts to continue to maintain appropriate standards of safety at sea.

Cargo handlers should also be aware of the following IACS Booklets:

- Bulk Carriers - Guidance and Information on Bulk Cargo Loading and Discharging to reduce the likelihood of Over-Stressing the Hull Structure
- Bulk Carriers - Handle with Care

Additionally, they should be aware of a video made by Videotel Productions, also entitled "Bulk Carriers - Handle with Care". An IACS booklet accompanies this video and reference is made to it in the video.

9. | INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CLASSIFICATION SOCIETIES (IACS)

At the time of issue of this version, Member Societies of the International Association of Classification Societies (IACS) are:

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| • American Bureau of Shipping | https://ww2.eagle.org/en.html |
| • Bureau Veritas | https://www.veristar.com |
| • China Classification Society | https://www.ccs.org.cn/ccswzen |
| • Croatian Register of Shipping | http://www.crs.hr/en-us/home.aspx |
| • Det Norske Veritas | https://www.dnv.com |
| • Indian Register of Shipping | https://www.irclass.org |
| • Korean Register of Shipping | |
| • Lloyd's Register of Shipping | https://www.lr.org |
| • Nippon Kaiji Kyokai | https://www.classnk.or.jp |
| • Polish Rejestr Statków S.A. | https://www.prs.pl |
| • Registro Italiano Navale | https://www.rina.org |
| • Russian Maritime Register of Shipping | https://rs-class.org |

IACS was formed by seven leading class societies in 1968. The value of their combined and unique level of classification knowledge and experience in contributing to maritime safety and its regulatory regime was quickly recognised. In 1969, IACS was accordingly given consultative status with the IMO. It remains the only non-governmental organisation with Observer status that is able to develop and apply structural rules.

The conditions of membership of IACS depend upon such factors as years of experience, size and number of ocean-going vessels classed, numbers of exclusive technical staff and the Rules and Register being published in English.

Each Member of IACS can be defined as a Classification Society having comprehensive Classification rules compiled on the basis of sound research and development; a worldwide network of well qualified surveyors; efficient and effective feedback of significant technical data via surveyor's reports and an internationally recognised quality management system.

IACS has agreed on numerous Unified Requirements (URs). These URs pertain to Classification rules and because they are unified, are contained in the Classification rules of all member Societies. In carrying out statutory work, IACS members are aware of the need for Unified Interpretations (UIs) when applying IMO Conventions. For example, it would not be good for any Administration, if say 3 ships flying that administration's flag were classed by 3 different IACS Members, who each interpreted Convention regulations differently. Great care is taken to avoid this and numerous Unified Interpretations have been agreed and IMO informed accordingly.

More than 90% of the world's cargo carrying tonnage is covered by the classification design, construction and through-life compliance rules and standards set by the Member Societies of IACS. Each year almost 10,000 surveyors, employed by IACS member Societies in approx. 140 countries, undertake some 380,000 classification surveys on ships in service and they carry out statutory surveys for over 100 maritime administrations in the world.

An IACS Quality System Certification Scheme (QSCS) is applied to ensure uniform application of work performed by IACS Members. The quality system requirements of IACS have been based upon the applicable requirements of ISO 9001:1994 adopted and applied as stated in ISO 9004. Additionally however, in order to confirm efficient application of a Quality System in practice, the IACS QSCS incorporates a requirement for vertical audit. This is carried out on a sample basis in various areas of work selected by the Quality Secretary, and goes beyond the ISO requirements. Each member Society has been audited by an IACS audit team led by the Quality Secretary, on the basis of which, IACS Quality System Certificates of Conformity have been issued. IMO participates in the audits through a consultant/observer, who reports to the IMO Secretary-General. IMO also participates in an IACS QSCS Advisory Committee of independent industry representatives. It is also of interest to note that at its sixty sixth session at IMO during 28th May to 6th June 1996, the Maritime Safety Committee expressed the view that, through the IACS QSCS, Administrations may accept that IACS Societies meet the requirements of Appendix 1 to IMO Resolution A.739 (18) concerning minimum standards for recognised organisations acting on behalf of Administrations. Thus, the IACS QSCS is internationally recognised.

About The Authors

This document was originally developed by the ICHCA Technical Panel.

International Cargo Handling Coordination Association

Established in 1952, ICHCA International is an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the safety, productivity and efficiency of cargo handling and movement worldwide. ICHCA's privileged NGO status enables it to represent its members, and the cargo handling industry at large, in front of national and international agencies and regulatory bodies, while its Technical Panel provides best practice advice and develops publications on a wide range of practical cargo handling issues. Operating through a series of national and regional chapters, including ICHCA Australia, ICHCA Japan and Correspondence and Working Groups, ICHCA provides a focal point for informing, educating, lobbying and networking to improve knowledge and best practice across the cargo handling chain.

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Further Advice and Information

ICHCA International also offers a technical advisory service, with input from ICHCA Technical Panel, to answer member regulatory and operational cargo handling queries. For more information contact secretariat@ichca.com or visit www.ichca.com