The following highlights actions taken at IMO’s Maritime Safety Committee’s 91st session which met from 26 to 30 November. A significant number of SOLAS amendments were adopted at this session of the MSC. A full report of MSC 91 will be included in the next ABS International Regulatory News Update.

New Code on Noise Level Limits

The MSC adopted resolution MSC.337(91) which contains a new Code (with mandatory and recommendatory provisions) which sets out to prevent the occurrence of potentially hazardous noise levels on board ships and to provide standards for an acceptable environment for seafarers. Compliance with the Code requires measurement of noise levels in work, navigation, accommodation and service spaces under simulated port conditions and at normal service speed at no less than 80% of the maximum continuous rating (MCR). Deviation from this normal service condition may be permitted for ships with special propulsion and power configurations, such as diesel-electric systems.

Newly adopted SOLAS regulation II-1/13-2 as contained in resolution MSC.338(91) will apply the Code to new ships ≥ 1600 gt - unless the Administration deems that compliance with a particular provision is unreasonable or impractical. New ships are those:

- with a building contract placed on or after 1 July 2014; or
- in the absence of a building contract, the keel of which is laid or which is at a similar stage of construction on or after 1 January 2015; or
- regardless of the building contract or keel laying date, the delivery is on or after 1 July 2018. Certain types of vessels, including high-speed craft, pile driving vessels, dredgers and mobile offshore drilling units, are exempted.

Adopted SOLAS Amendments (MSC.338(91)) - Fire-fighting Arrangements

Means of communication – At least two (2) two-way portable radiotelephones are to be provided for each fire party designated onboard ships constructed on or after 1 July 2014. Ships constructed before 1 July 2014 are to comply no later than the first annual survey after 1 July 2018. These provisions apply to portable radios used on tankers and those intended to be used in hazardous areas of all ships which are to be of an explosion-proof or intrinsically-safe type.

Breathing apparatus - Self-contained compressed air-operated breathing apparatus of fire-fighter’s outfits provided onboard all ships shall, no later than 1 July 2019, have a capacity of at least 1,200 liters, or be capable of functioning for at least 30 minutes. These amendments do not phase-out existing pump and hose breathing systems which were permitted on ships constructed before 1 January 2002. Each compressed air breathing apparatus is to be fitted with an audible alarm and a visual or other device which will alert the user before the volume of the air in the cylinder has been reduced to no less than 200 liters. All air cylinders for breathing apparatus are to be interchangeable. No later than 1 July 2014, all ships are to carry onboard a means of recharging breathing apparatus cylinders used during drills or a suitable number of spare cylinders to replace used cylinders.
Fixed fire-extinguishing systems - On ships constructed on or after 1 July 2014, vehicle spaces and ro-ro spaces, which are capable of being sealed from a location outside of the cargo spaces, are to be fitted with one of the three types of fixed fire-extinguishing systems (gas, high-expansion foam or water-based) as specified in the Fire Systems Safety (FSS) Code. Ships with vehicle spaces and ro-ro spaces that are not capable of being sealed from a location outside of the cargo spaces are to be fitted with an FSS Code fixed water-based fire-fighting system that is arranged with the additional provisions:

- a pressure gauge on the valve manifold;
- clear marking on each manifold valve indicating the spaces served;
- maintenance and operation instructions located in the valve room; and
- a sufficient number of drainage valves to ensure complete drainage of the system.

FFS Code Amendments

Revisions to the requirements in the Fire Fighting Systems (FFS) Code were adopted as contained in resolution MSC.339(91). The revisions address fixed fire fighting systems of the gas, deck-foam, water-spray and water-mist type and apply to ships constructed on or after 1 July 2014. Starting conditions for the emergency fire pump and emergency source of power requirements for fire detection and alarms systems which are fitted on ships constructed on or after 1 July 2014 were also adopted.

SOLAS Life Saving Appliance Amendments

All ships are to be provided with plans and procedures for recovery of persons from the water. The plans and procedures (which do not need to be approved by the Administration) are to identify the equipment intended to be used for recovery purposes and measures to be taken to minimize the risk to shipboard personnel involved in recovery operations.

Ships constructed on or after 1 July 2014 are to comply at delivery. Ships constructed before 1 July 2014 shall comply by the first intermediate or first renewal survey of the ship to be carried out after 1 July 2014, whichever comes first. Ro-ro passenger ships which are fitted with an approved marine evacuation system are not required to comply with this regulation. Guidelines for the development of plans and procedures for recovery of persons from the water were also approved.

IBC Code Revision

The Committee adopted resolution MSC.340(91) which contains revisions to the carriage requirements for products in Chapter 17 of the IBC Code, as well as Chapters 18 and 19 of that Code. These are the same revisions contained in resolution MEPC.225(64) that was adopted in October by MEPC 64. On entry into force of these amendments on 1 June 2014, a chemical tanker will be required to be certified with a revised cargo list (where relevant) and a revised Certificate of Fitness. There are approximately 150 products that have revised carriage requirements.

A majority of the revisions relate to the retroactive requirement, under MSC.1/Circ.1324, that the Maximum Experimental Safe Gap (MESG) value for the media used to test Flame Preventer Devices corresponds to the product certified to be carried in the tank fitted with that tested device.
Approved SOLAS Revisions (scheduled to be adopted in June 2013 by MSC 92)

**Entry Into Enclosed Spaces** - The Committee approved draft amendments to SOLAS chapter III, the 1994 and 2000 HSC Codes, the DSSC Code and the MODU Codes related to enclosed space entry and rescue drills. Such drills, which are to be held onboard at least once every two months, are to check personal protective equipment, rescue equipment and communication equipment and procedures.

**Muster Drills** – On passenger ships engaged on a voyage where passengers are scheduled to be on board for more than 24 hours, musters of, and safety briefings with, newly-embarked passengers shall take place prior to or immediately upon departure. Currently, SOLAS allows such musters to take place within 24 hours after embarkation. In association with this amendment, a revised Circular was agreed recommending passenger ship companies to undertake a review of operational safety measures to enhance the safety of passenger ships. The Circular addresses the stowage of additional lifejackets, the adequacy of the dissemination and communication of the emergency instructions and elements to be addressed in muster and emergency instructions.

**Ship Energy Efficiency**

In determining a ship’s Attained Energy Efficiency Design Index (EEDI) as per resolution MEPC.212(63), the Committee concurred with MEPC 64’s decision that a lower threshold for the minimum installed propulsion power for bulk carriers, oil and chemical tankers and combination carriers is needed. These ships are to have a minimum power to maintain maneuverability under adverse weather conditions (Beaufort 8 – 6.0m significant wave height; 19.0 m/s mean wind speed). The method for determining this lower minimum threshold is contained in a set of interim guidelines which were approved by the MEPC and MSC 91 and will be issued as an MSC/MEPC Circular.