



भारत सरकार / GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
पत्तन, पोत परिवहन और जलमार्ग मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF PORTS, SHIPPING AND WATERWAYS
समुद्रीय प्रशासन महानिदेशालय, मुंबई
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF MARITIME ADMINISTRATION, MUMBAI

F.No. 13-14/6/2022-ENGG-DGS

October 21, 2026

Draft ISM Circular for stakeholders' comments, suggestions, inputs.

The ISM Branch circular on minimum qualification & experience requirements for the Designated Person Ashore (DPA) and the Alternate DPA is placed on the DGMA website for the perusal of the shipping companies, and other stakeholders. It is requested that inputs/comments, if any, on the draft be directly submitted to the ISM Branch, DGMA by the stakeholder concerned..

The inputs or suggestions may be sent by email, addressed to praveen.nair@gov.in latest by October 31, 2026. It is requested that sender may mention the subject on the email, as 'inputs on the draft ISM Circular' for ease of compilation.

Yours sincerely,

Praveen Nair,
Dy.Chief Surveyor, DGMA

Encl: Draft ISM Circular

Draft DGMA ISM Branch Circular No.xx of 2026

Subject: Minimum qualification, training and experience requirements for Designated Person Ashore (DPA) and Alternate Designated Person Ashore (ADPA),reg.

1. Background

1.1 The International Safety Management (ISM) Code requires every Company to designate a person or persons ashore having direct access to the highest level of management to ensure the safe operation of each vessel and to provide a link between the Company and personnel on board.

1.2 Rule 7 of the Merchant Shipping (Safety Management) Rules, 2026 requires every Company to designate a Designated Person Ashore (DPA) and nominate an Alternate Designated Person Ashore (ADPA). The DPA shall have direct access to the highest level of management and shall be provided with the authority, resources and support necessary to discharge the responsibilities under the Safety Management System (SMS).

1.3 The said Rules further provide that the qualifications, training and experience required for appointment of the DPA and ADPA shall be in accordance with the rules dealing with survey, audit and certification.

1.4 In order to ensure uniform implementation of the ISM Code and the Merchant Shipping (Safety Management) Rules, 2026, and to establish appropriate minimum qualification, training and experience requirements commensurate with the type and nature of vessel operations, the following requirements are prescribed.

2. Applicability

2.1 This Circular shall apply to every Company required to comply with the Merchant Shipping (Safety Management) Rules, 2026 and the ISM Code, including Companies responsible for the management and operation of:

- (a) passenger ships including passenger high-speed crafts, of any size;
- (b) oil tankers, chemical tankers, gas carriers, bulk carriers, and cargo high-speed crafts of 500 gross tonnage or more;
- (c) other cargo vessels and mobile offshore drilling units of 500 gross tonnage or more;
- (d) domestic vessels of 500 gross tonnage or more

2.2 The DPA qualification shall be commensurate with the type, size, area of operation and complexity of the vessels covered under the Company's Document of Compliance (DOC) or Domestic Document of Compliance (DDOC), as applicable.

3. Minimum Qualification, Training and Experience

3.1 The DPA shall possess one of the qualifications/experience combinations specified in **Annexure-I** to this Circular, as applicable to the category of vessel covered by the Company's DOC/DDOC.

3.2 The qualification and experience of the DPA shall be relevant to the type of vessels for which the Company holds or seeks a DOC/DDOC.

3.3 In addition to the minimum qualification specified in Annexure-I, the DPA shall have:

- a. adequate knowledge of the ISM Code and its implementation;
- b. appropriate knowledge of the Company's SMS and its operation;
- c. adequate knowledge of applicable maritime safety and pollution-prevention requirements;
- d. appropriate knowledge of shipboard operations relevant to the vessels under management; and
- e. appropriate training and experience to effectively discharge the functions of the DPA.

3.4 The DPA shall have undergone training in the implementation and auditing of a Safety Management System appropriate to the responsibilities assigned. Such training or course shall be conducted by a Recognised Organisation (RO) recognised by the Government of India or a course approved by the Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA).

3.5 The qualification, training and experience requirements specified in this Circular shall apply equally to the ADPA, commensurate with the responsibilities to be discharged, unless otherwise specifically provided by DGMA.

4. Category-wise Qualification Requirements:

4.1 The minimum qualification and experience requirements for DPA/ADPA shall be as specified in **Annexure-I**.

4.2 Where a Company manages vessels falling under more than one category, the DPA shall meet the qualification and experience requirements applicable to the most demanding category of vessel under the Company's DOC/DDOC.

4.3 In the case of specialised vessels or operations not specifically covered in Annexure-I, the Company shall obtain prior acceptance of the proposed DPA qualification and experience from DGMA.

4.4 For vessels having specialised operations, the DPA shall possess adequate relevant operational or managerial experience appropriate to such operations.

5. Verification during DOC/DDOC Audit

5.1 The qualification, training, experience and effective functioning of the DPA and ADPA shall be verified during the initial, annual, intermediate, renewal or additional audit of the Company's SMS, as applicable.

5.2 The audit shall include verification of:

- a. availability and accessibility of the DPA;
- b. direct access to the highest level of management;
- c. adequacy of authority and resources;
- d. effectiveness of communication between ship and shore;
- e. monitoring of safety and pollution-prevention activities;
- f. follow-up of accidents, incidents and non-conformities;

g. implementation of corrective and preventive actions; and

h. evidence demonstrating the effective discharge of DPA responsibilities.

5.3 Mere designation of a person as DPA without effective discharge of the responsibilities specified under the ISM Code shall not be considered adequate compliance.

6. Companies Managing Vessels from Outside India

6.1 In the case of a Company managing Indian-flagged vessels from outside India, the DPA shall comply with the qualification, training and experience requirements specified in this Circular and shall maintain effective and continuous communication with the vessels and the highest level of management of the Company.

6.2 Where the DPA does not meet the qualification requirements prescribed in Annex-I, the Company shall submit the details of the proposed DPA, including qualifications, training and experience, to the ISM Cell of the DGMA for consideration and necessary concurrence and acceptance.

6.3 The Company shall ensure that the DPA has adequate knowledge of the applicable Indian statutory requirements and the requirements applicable to the vessels under the Company's management.

7. Existing Companies and Transitional Arrangements

7.1 Companies holding a valid DOC/DDOC on the date of commencement of this Circular shall review the qualification, training and experience of their existing DPA and ADPA against the requirements specified herein.

7.2 Existing DPA/ADPA arrangements which were accepted under the prevailing requirements may continue, subject to satisfactory performance and compliance with the applicable requirements, until the next renewal audit or such earlier date as may be specified by DGMA.

7.3 Where a change of DPA/ADPA is made after the effective date of this Circular, the newly appointed person shall comply with the requirements specified herein.

8. Non-compliance

Failure to comply with the requirements relating to appointment, qualification, training, experience or effective functioning of the DPA/ADPA may be treated as a deficiency in the Company's Safety Management System and may result in appropriate action under the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, the Merchant Shipping (Safety Management) Rules, 2026 and the Merchant Shipping (Survey, Audit and Certification) Rules, 2026, as applicable.

9. Supersession

This Circular supersedes all previous DGMA/DGS instructions, circulars or administrative directions relating specifically to the minimum qualification, training and experience requirements of the DPA/ADPA, to the extent inconsistent with this Circular.

10. Effective Date

This Circular shall come into force with effect from the date of its issue. All Companies, shipowners, operators, ship managers and Recognised Organisations are advised to ensure strict compliance with the requirements contained herein.

ANNEXURE-I

MINIMUM QUALIFICATION, TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR DPA/ADPA

Category	Vessel category	Minimum qualification / eligibility	Relevant experience / additional requirement
A	Passenger Ships; Passenger High-Speed Craft; Cargo High-Speed Craft; Oil Tankers; Chemical Tankers; Gas Carriers, irrespective of size; Bulk Carriers, Other Cargo Ships or OSVs of 3,000 GT and above	(i) Indian Certificate of Competency or a Certificate of Competency recognised by the Government of India as Master (FG) or MEO Class-I; or (ii) Naval Architect having minimum 5 years relevant experience as ISM Lead Auditor with a Classification Society or Maritime Administration	The person shall hold a responsible position in the organisation and possess appropriate operational/managerial knowledge of the relevant category of vessels.
B	i) Bulk Carriers, Oil Tankers, Chemical Tankers, Gas Carriers and Other Cargo Ships of less than 3,000 GT , operating on the coast of India or NCV Area ii) All types of Domestic Vessels	(i) Qualification as specified for Category A; or (ii) Indian Certificate of Competency or a Certificate of Competency recognised by the Government of India as Chief Mate (FG) or MEO Class-II or Master (NCV) or Chief Engineer (NCV) with adequate sea experience; or (iii) Naval Architect having minimum 2 years' experience as ISM Lead Auditor with a Classification Society or Maritime Administration Or (iv) For companies managing Dredgers exclusively: the Indian Certificate of Competency or a Certificate of Competency recognised by the Government of India as Dredge Engineer Grade I or Dredge Master Grade I	The person shall hold a responsible position in the organisation and have adequate operational/managerial knowledge relevant to the vessels under management.

C	MODUs/MOUs, including FPSOs, FSUs and other specialised offshore support vessels such as DP diving support vessels	(i) Qualification as specified for Category A; or (ii) Graduate in Mechanical, Electrical, Marine or Petroleum Engineering having at least 5 years' experience in the relevant field	The person shall hold a senior management position and possess relevant operational/managerial experience appropriate to the specialised offshore operation.
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Important Notes

1. The above qualification requirements are minimum requirements. The Company shall ensure that the DPA possesses competence commensurate with the actual type and complexity of vessels under its management.
2. Where the Company's DOC/DDOC covers more than one vessel category, the DPA shall meet the requirements applicable to the highest applicable category.
3. For specialised vessels or vessel operations not specifically covered in this Annexure, DGMA may determine the appropriate qualification, training and experience requirements on a case-to-case basis.
4. The DPA/ADPA shall possess appropriate knowledge of the ISM Code, the Company's SMS and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.
5. Relevant training in DPA functions, Safety Management Systems and ISM Code implementation/auditing shall be completed as prescribed by DGMA from time to time.
6. Experience as an ISM Lead Auditor shall be supported by documentary evidence and shall be relevant to the type of vessels and operations covered by the Company's DOC/DDOC.
7. The qualification and experience of an ADPA shall be appropriate to effectively assume the functions and responsibilities of the DPA during the latter's absence.
8. The appointment of a DPA is not an option but rather a legal obligation for every company operating commercial vessels of 500 GT and over. No two DoC holding companies can have the same DPA, irrespective of them belonging to the same group company.