



# SHIP SAFETY BULLETIN

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**Subject:** Requirements for passenger submersibles operating in Canadian waters

## Scope

This bulletin applies to passenger submersibles operating in Canadian waters.

## Purpose

This bulletin:

- clarifies the existing requirements for constructing and operating passenger submersibles in Canadian waters, and
- reminds Authorized Representatives about their legal obligations

## Background

Given recent safety concerns on the use of passenger submersibles, Transport Canada wants to remind the marine industry of Canada’s requirements for these vessels and how they’re registered, constructed and operated in Canadian waters.

## What you need to know

### Construction and safety standards

In 2001, the International Maritime Organization published *Guidelines for the design, construction and operation of passenger submersible craft* (MSC/circ. 981). These guidelines set construction and safety standards for passenger submersibles operating in international waters. [Transport Canada issued a policy \(PDF, 19.2 KB\) \(accessible only on the Transport Canada network\)](#) that states that all non-pleasure passenger submersibles registered in Canada must be constructed according to the guidelines. A passenger submersible includes any submersible used for non-pleasure purposes such as data gathering operations (e.g., science and research), or

**Keywords:**

1. Passenger Submersible
2. Submersible
3. PSC

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passenger operations with paying passengers onboard (even those who have embarked as part of a cruise experience).

To register a submersible in Canada, Authorized Representatives must submit a request to the Marine Technical Review Board. The Marine Technical Review Board will review the application to determine whether the construction standards provide an equivalent level of safety as the regulations that apply to standard surface vessels. Their decision is informed by Transport Canada's policy, the International Maritime Organization's MSC/Circ. 981 guidelines, as well as the design, construction and maintenance rules set by a recognized classification society.

Submersibles that are constructed and registered in a foreign country but want to operate in Canada may be subject to monitoring inspection. During the inspection, submersible operators will be required to show that the submersible meets the safety standards set by the MSC/Circ.981 guidelines or equivalent requirements set by the submersible's registered flag state.

If an inspection finds that the submersible does not comply with these standards, enforcement measures may follow, and the submersible may be detained.

## **Personnel certification requirements**

### *Canadian Registered Passenger Submersible*

The *Marine Personnel Regulations* require personnel who operate a Canadian-registered passenger submersible craft to have a Passenger Submersible Craft endorsement. In order to obtain a Passenger Submersible craft endorsement, a person must:

- hold a Master, Mate, or Engineer Certificate
- be certified in commercial diving
- hold a Marine Basic First Aid Training Certificate, and
- provide a testimonial that they have completed training that was approved by the vessel manufacturer

In addition to holding a Passenger Submersible craft endorsement, the master of a passenger submersible craft shall also hold a certificate in accordance with Section 212 of the *Marine Personnel Regulations* and Table 1 of that section.

The submersible's propulsion system, and anticipated voyage will determine the number of engineers required on board and their certification.

- A passenger submersible craft equipped with an internal combustion engine of 750 kW or less or an electric propulsion system of at least 75 kW but not more than 750 kW, must have onboard an engineer who holds at minimum a Small Vessel Machinery Operator Certificate with a Passenger Submersible Craft Endorsement.
- A passenger submersible craft that has a propulsive power of more than 750 kW must have onboard, and its authorized representative shall employ, engineers required by section 219 of the *Marine Personnel Regulations*, who shall also hold a Passenger Submersible craft endorsement.
- If a passenger submersible craft that is a passenger-carrying vessel is not required to have

on board an engineer with a certificate of competency, the authorized representative shall assign the maintenance of the vessel's machinery to a technician accredited for this purpose by the manufacturer.

Canadian vessels must also meet the requirements for training, familiarization and manning in accordance with Division 2 of the *Marine Personnel Regulations*.

#### *Foreign Registered Passenger Submersible*

Foreign-registered passenger submersibles are required to meet the personnel requirements outlined in section 241 of the *Marine Personnel Regulations*. This would include having the following persons on board:

- the master of the vessel
- persons needed to form the life-saving team, radio watch, deck watch and engineering watch
- a person in charge of the vessel's machinery
- if applicable, persons required by the Safe Manning Document or equivalent document

#### **How Canada oversees submersibles**

Any submersible that wants to operate in Canadian waters must report, either verbally or in writing, to the nearest Canadian Coast Guard's Marine Communications and Traffic Services (MCTS) Centres. The location of these centres and their contact information can be found in the [\*Radio Aids to Marine Navigation\*](#).

The report must be submitted 96 hours before the dive, with a call to MCTS occurring just as the dive is starting, confirming key elements, and again upon the completion of the dive. Please see Annex A for details on what must be included in each report.

A Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centre Officer will review the information to determine if a Navigational Warning is required. Navigational Warnings are issued for crewed and uncrewed submersibles when their operations constitute a potential danger in or near shipping lanes, thereby informing vessels and permitting them to take any safety actions they deem necessary. The Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centre will forward the plan to Transport Canada who will determine if more information is required to assess the safety of the operation.

Submersibles registered in Canada are overseen by Transport Canada under the *Canada Shipping Act, 2001*. Depending on their size or the number of passengers carried, they may be subject to mandatory or risk-based inspections.

If you operate any submersible in Canadian waters and we find that: (i) the vessel does not comply with the appropriate construction, equipment, and certification requirements, or (ii) operates in areas they are not permitted, such as ice-covered waters, marine protected areas, or environmentally or culturally sensitive areas, the Authorized Representative could be subject to enforcement action.

## **Search and Rescue**

The ability of the Canadian search and rescue system to provide a response for sub-surface incidents involving civilian submersibles is extremely limited, and the challenge increases with the depth of the submersible. In the case of an incident involving a submersible, should it not self-surface, the only intervention capability would be for search and rescue personnel to engage with international experts and organizations to leverage their capabilities and expertise and for the Canadian Coast Guard to provide surface asset support. Any intervention that could be mounted may take an extended period of time to deploy depending on the remoteness of the submersible, further complicating search and rescue efforts.

## ***Annex A***

### **Information to be provided prior to dive**

- Name of mother vessel
- IMO Number of mother vessel
- Number of crew and passengers onboard
- Date of planned dive
- Location (area delimited by GPS coordinates) and time of dive
- Duration of dive, maximum depth planned for the operation
- Maximum water depth in the diving area
- Submersible specifications
  - Certification and classification documents, including their expiration dates
  - Passenger and crew capacity
  - Design diving depth
  - Rated diving depth
  - Endurance (hours)
- Crew training
- Emergency response plan

### **Information to be provided upon dive completion**

- Confirmation that the dive has been completed.

### ***Related links***

- [Marine Safety Management System – Tier I Policy – Passenger Submersible Craft \(PDF, 19.2 KB\)](#) (accessible only on the Transport Canada network)
- [Guidelines for the Design, Construction and Operation of Passenger Submersible Craft \(MSC/CIRC 981\) \(PDF, 77.7 KB\)](#)