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NMC Guidance Document 02-05

May 04, 2005

From: Commanding Officer, U. S. Coast Guard, National Maritime Center

To: Distribution

Subj: DEMONSTRATIONS OF COMPETENCE IN VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS  
(FLASHING LIGHT)

Ref: (a) International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and  
Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as amended (STCW)  
(b) Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations (46 CFR), Part 10

1. PURPOSE. This document provides guidance on demonstrations of competence in visual communications. The guidance in this document may assist industry and individual mariners to meet the requirements of references (a) and (b).
2. ACTION. Commanding officers of units with marine safety responsibilities should be guided by the information in this document. This guidance is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements, nor is it itself a rule. It is not intended to, nor does it impose, legally binding requirements on any party. Applicants for the credentials addressed in this policy letter may propose alternatives to qualify for these credentials. Such alternatives should be forwarded to the U. S. Coast Guard National, Maritime Center for evaluation against the standards of references (a) and (b). This guidance document will be distributed by electronic means only. It is available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.uscg.mil/STCW/m-policy.htm>.
3. DIRECTIVES AFFECTED. National Maritime Center Policy Letter 03-03 is superseded and cancelled.
4. BACKGROUND.
  - a. Title 46 CFR 10.401(h) requires that all applicants for near coastal and oceans licenses above 1600 gross registered tons (GRT), either original or raise in grade, pass a practical signaling examination. To date, this examination has been administered either at Coast Guard Regional Examination Centers (RECs), or as part of a Coast Guard approved visual communications course.
  - b. The STCW Code also requires that candidates for certification as Officer in Charge of a Navigational Watch on Ships of 500 Gross Tonnage (GT) or More (greater than 200 GRT) demonstrate competency to *transmit and receive information by visual signaling*.

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c. In its Fall 2002 meeting, the Merchant Marine Personnel Advisory Committee (MERPAC) recommended several changes to the criteria the Coast Guard uses to assess competence in visual communications.

d. This document implements MERPAC's recommendations and provides guidance on the applicability of flashing light demonstration requirements.

5. DISCUSSION.

a. Guidance on the applicability of flashing light demonstration requirements is provided in enclosure (1).

b. Guidance for approval of visual communications courses is provided in enclosure (2). Schools wishing to have a visual communication course approved, or to modify an existing approved course, may submit a request to this office.

c. Until new equipment is procured at Coast Guard Regional Examination Centers (RECs), the administration of flashing light examinations will continue as per the instructions in the *Administration Guide for Merchant Marine Deck Licenses (Deck Guide)* February 2002, Assessment Guide 1-13. RECs will continue to offer this examination following the existing format of six words per minute with five letter groups and the passing score of 70%. As an alternative to an examination at an REC, mariners may opt to demonstrate competency in visual communications by successfully completing a Coast Guard approved *Visual Communications* course. Lists of Coast Guard approved courses can be found at the National Maritime Center web page, <http://www.uscg.mil/stcw/>.



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Encl: (1) Visual Communications Applicability Table  
(2) Recommendations for Visual Communications Courses

Dist: Commandant (G-MSO) (G-MOC); Area Commanders (Am) (Pm); All District Commanders (m); COs, all MSOs; All Sector Commanders; All RECs

VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS (FLASHING LIGHT) APPLICABILITY

License Tonnage	Route	Flashing Light Required?	Reference
<b>ORIGINAL ISSUE OF DECK OFFICER LICENSES &amp; STCW CERTIFICATES ≥ 200 GRT / 500 GT</b>			
>1600 GRT/3000 GT (also referred to as “unlimited” or “any gross tons”)	Oceans Near Coastal	Yes	46 CFR 10.401(h) 46 CFR 10.901(c)(1) 46 CFR 10.903(c) STCW Regulation II/1
>1600 GRT/3000 GT (also referred to as “unlimited” or “any gross tons”)	Inland	No	N/A
200 GRT/500 GT - 1600 GRT/3000 GT	Oceans Near Coastal	Yes	46 CFR 10.901(c)(1) 46 CFR 10.903(c) STCW Regulation II/1
200 GRT/500 GT – 1600 GRT/3000 GT	Inland	No	N/A
<200 GRT/500 GT	Oceans Near Coastal Inland	No	N/A
<b>UPGRADE OF DECK OFFICER LICENSES &amp; STCW CERTIFICATES ≥ 200 GRT / 500 GT</b>			
>1600 GRT/3000 GT (also referred to as “unlimited” or “any gross tons”)	Oceans Near Coastal	Yes	46 CFR 10.401(h)
>1600 GRT/3000 GT (also referred to as “unlimited” or “any gross tons”)	Inland	No	N/A
200 GRT/500 GT - 1600 GRT/3000 GT	Oceans Near Coastal	Yes <sup>1</sup>	46 CFR 10.901(c)(1) 46 CFR 10.903(c) STCW Regulation II/1
200 GRT/500 GT – 1600 GRT/3000 GT	Inland	No	N/A
<200 GRT/500 GT	Oceans Near Coastal Inland	No	N/A
<b>RENEWAL OF DECK OFFICER LICENSES &amp; STCW CERTIFICATES ≥ 200 GRT / 500 GT</b>			
>1600 GRT/3000 GT (also referred to as “unlimited” or “any gross tons”)	Oceans Near Coastal Inland	No	N/A
200 GRT/500 GT - 1600 GRT/3000 GT	Oceans Near Coastal	Yes <sup>1</sup>	46 CFR 10.901(c)(1) 46 CFR 10.903(c) STCW Regulation II/1
200 GRT/500 GT – 1600 GRT/3000 GT	Inland	No	N/A
<200 GRT/500 GT	Oceans Near Coastal Inland	No	N/A

<sup>1</sup> Only required if the mariner has not previously met the requirements of STCW Regulation II/1 for Officer In Charge of a Navigational Watch. The mariner is *not* required to complete flashing light if they have previously met the requirements of Regulation II/1 in connection with any prior license or STCW certificate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS (FLASHING LIGHT) COURSES

- There is no minimum course length. Practice exercises are recommended prior to the administration of the final assessment.
- Assessments of competence (final examinations) may be sent at the rate of four (4) words per minute or higher. Use of “long spaces” between letters is permissible.
- Final Assessment should consist of two sections; a *Random Letter Group* section, and an *International Code Of Signals (Pub. 102) Code Group* section.

The *Random Letter Group* section may consist of the signal identity “**DE**” followed by a four (4) letter identity signal or name, sent once. This is followed by five (5) random, three letter groups, each of which is transmitted twice. The ending signal (AR) indicates the end of the five (5) three letter groups. Five points are given for each correct letter in a group for a possible maximum total of 75 points (15 letters x 5 points each = 75 points).

The *International Code Of Signals (Pub. 102) Code Group* consists of the signal identity “**DE**” followed by a four (4) letter identity signal or name, sent once. “YU” is then sent (once) indicating that a Code Group follows, after which five (5) code groups are sent, each of which are transmitted twice. The ending signal (AR) indicates the end of the five (5) letter groups. Each correctly decoded group is worth five points for a total of 25 points (5 code groups decoded correctly x 5 points each = 25 points).

The practice of recording all random letter groups and all code groups, will continue to be entered on the applicant’s answer sheet in the exact order as transmitted. As in the past, any group where the letters are misarranged will cause that group to be found in error. Minimum acceptable score for the entire exam is 70%.

- Students may copy the single or multiple letter groups by dot and dash character on scrap paper during transmission. After transmission is completed, the student should be allowed up to one (1) hour to decipher the five code groups using Pub. 102, and transfer the results onto the answer sheet.
- Signals may be sent either by a tape recorder/light configuration, or computer software. Schools wishing to use computer software should submit a copy of the software to the National Maritime Center for evaluation.
- Alternative methods of demonstrating competency in visual communications may be submitted to the National Maritime Center for evaluation.