



Australian Government

Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Drug and alcohol policy – Class 1, 2 and 3

Guidance: Marine Order 504 changes



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Contents

<u>Drug and alcohol policy – Class 1, 2 and 3</u>	4
How to develop a drug and alcohol policy	4
Step 1. Educate	4
Step 2. Develop	4
Step 3. Trial	5
Step 4. Monitor, review and revise	5
Step 5. Instruct and train	5
Scenarios and examples	6
16m Class 3B fishing vessel	6
7.4m Class 2D workboat	7
4.6m Class 3D fishing vessel	7
Useful resources	8
Questions and answers	8
Contact	8

Drug and alcohol policy – Class 1, 2 and 3

From 1 June 2025, all domestic commercial vessel (DCV) operators must have a policy outlining how they manage the risks of drugs and alcohol included in their safety management system (SMS).

AMSA introduced this change to address the safety risks associated with drug and alcohol use.

It is important that all masters, crew and special personnel:

- are made aware of your alcohol and drug policy
- are assessed as fit to undertake their duties
- are not impaired by alcohol or drugs.

Operators of passenger-carrying vessels are also required to include a policy outlining how they manage the risks of drugs and alcohol for passengers.

How to develop a drug and alcohol policy

Documentation: Develop your drug and alcohol policy as a document and store it in your SMS.

After developing your policy, you may need to update other documents in your SMS impacted by your drug and alcohol policy, such as:

- employee induction
- vessel operation procedures
- training.

Level of detail: The level of detail in your policy depends on the size and complexity of your operation.

A drug and alcohol policy for a solo operator or vessel operation eligible to use a simplified SMS may be a few sentences. A policy for a larger operation may require a bit more detail.

Follow these steps to develop a policy for the nature and complexity of your operation.

Step 1. Educate

Start by learning about drugs and alcohol in the workplace. Refer to:

- guidance on drugs and alcohol e.g. from [Safe Work Australia](#)
- state/territory legislation on drugs and alcohol, including those covering possession, alcohol limits and use
- AMSA's [guidance on work health and safety on DCVs](#).

Step 2. Develop

The vessel owner should develop the policy in consultation with the master and crew.

Whatever your policy on drug and alcohol use, make sure you consider the risks to the crew's ability to undertake their duties safely, including in an emergency.

Note: You must make sure your policy aligns with any state/territory legislation where the vessel is operating (see Step 1).

What to consider

The considerations below are just a starting point. Different considerations may apply to your specific vessel's operation.

- **Acceptable and unacceptable drug and alcohol use:** Consider whether to have a 'dry vessel' where no alcohol, prohibited drugs or non-prescribed medication are allowed or whether to permit crew to have a limited supply of alcohol at the end of their work day. Where alcohol is allowed, consider how this will be managed and any impact it may have on crew ability to undertake duties in an emergency.
- **Drug and alcohol disclosure:** Consider whether to request crew members to inform you about any prescription medications they're taking. This could be important to know in case there are any undesirable effects from the medication e.g. drowsiness. It will also enable you to have a full understanding of medications required in a medical emergency.
- **Drug and alcohol testing:** Consider whether to conduct drug and alcohol testing prior to crew boarding the vessel as part of pre-departure checks.
- **Unfit for duty/under the influence:** Consider how you will manage a situation where the master or a crew member is determined to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol and unfit for duty.

Step 3. Trial

Trial your policy for 1-2 months to identify and address any problems. Then ask:

- How well is the policy working?
- Is anything missing or does it need amending?

Step 4. Monitor, review and revise

Once the initial policy has been developed and trialled and you're sure it's fit for purpose, you can implement the policy into your SMS. We recommended that you review it:

- annually to reflect any changes in legislation, best practices or improvements you identify
- after any marine incident
- as new medications are prescribed to crew members
- as new medical conditions arise among crew members.

Make sure you stay informed about any new developments in drug or alcohol testing technology or legal requirements that may affect your operations.

Step 5. Instruct and train

Induct all existing and joining crew on your drug and alcohol policy.

Conduct regular training sessions and meetings with the master and crew to help reinforce the policy and ensure that all crew understand their responsibility and importance of sticking to it.

Scenarios and examples

16m Class 3B fishing vessel

The owner and master of a 16m Class 3B fishing vessel have determined that they will operate a dry vessel – this means no prohibited drugs or non-prescription medication, and no alcohol.

They've developed a short, written policy which will be part of the crew induction. They've also included the policy in the ongoing procedures under the SMS.

Drug and alcohol policy

Acceptable and unacceptable drug and alcohol use

We have a zero-tolerance policy for the use of alcohol, prohibited drugs and non-prescribed medication on our vessel.

Drug and alcohol disclosure

Any crew member taking prescription medication must inform the owner and provide evidence of the prescription and details of known side effects. The owner and master will then determine if there are any tasks that the crew member will be unable to perform during the planned voyage.

Drug and alcohol testing

Drug and alcohol testing will be conducted prior to crew boarding the vessel as part of pre-departure checks, or at any time when at sea. This will ensure no crew member is under the influence.

Unfit for duty

Crew members who are unfit for duty will not be able to undertake any roles or tasks until deemed fit by the master and they will not be permitted to board the vessel.

The master and crew acknowledge their understanding of the new policy by signing the updated induction or training record.

7.4m Class 2D workboat

The owner of 7.4m Class 2D workboats has a contract to maintain the pylons of jetties within their local area. Each vessel operates with a minimum of 2 crew members, which may increase to 3 depending on the day's work requirements.

Drug and alcohol policy

We maintain a zero-tolerance approach to the use of alcohol, prohibited drugs and non-prescribed medication on our vessels.

Acceptable and unacceptable drug and alcohol use

Due to the nature of the work, and as our vessels only operate during daylight hours, alcohol, prohibited drugs and non-prescription medication are prohibited on board at all times.

All crew members must report for duty free from the effects of alcohol and drugs.

Drug and alcohol disclosure

Crew members who take prescribed medications must inform the owner and provide evidence of the prescription and details of known side effects. Based on known side effects, the owner will assess what duties they can undertake.

Unfit for duty procedure

Any crew member found to be under the influence will be denied boarding.

These policies are included in the SMS. All crew members are required to acknowledge their understanding by signing the updated training record.

4.6m Class 3D fishing vessel

The owner is the sole operator of a 4.6m Class 3D fishing boat, operating in a mud crab fishery in sheltered water limits. As a moderate drinker and user of prescription medication they adapt their policy to suit their operation.

Drug and alcohol policy

I don't drink the night before any fishing activities. Prescription medication is permitted due to the length of time it has been taken with no side effects caused.

Unfit for duty procedure

Where I consider myself unfit for duty, I will not operate the vessel.

Useful resources

- [Stay Afloat](#) - Worried about the drug, alcohol or other substance use of a worker or colleague? You can get in touch (or put them in touch) with Stay Afloat – The Seafood Industry National Mental Health and Wellbeing program.
- [Sea Safe](#) - Changing your alcohol and drugs policy may be uncomfortable for some workers. For advice on ways to further support this behaviour change, get in touch with Sea Safe – The National Seafood Industry Safety Culture program.

Questions and answers

Q. I already have a drug and alcohol policy. Do I need to do anything?

A. If you already have a drug and alcohol policy in place to meet your work health and safety (WHS) obligations, check that:

- a copy is included in the vessel's SMS
- you have inducted all your existing crew on the policy
- you are inducting all new crew when they join the vessel, and
- you regularly train your crew on the reasons for having the policy.

Q: Will AMSA require a minimum number of drug and alcohol tests to be conducted and recorded each year?

A: You won't be required to conduct and record a minimum number of tests.

Vessel owners and operators have the flexibility to assess the specific risks to their operation. Owners will be able to decide what controls – through testing or otherwise - need to be implemented to ensure a vessel is not being operated while a master or crew member is impaired.

Q: How can I find out about the possible side effects of medication that my crew are taking?

A: If a crew member is prescribed a new medicine, their pharmacist should provide them with a [Consumer Medicine Information \(CMI\) leaflet](#). For further information, visit the [Healthdirect Australia website](#) or consult your local health care professional.

Contact

Got a question about this requirement? Please [contact us](#)