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International Maritime Organization (IMO)

By WILL KENTON Updated November 27, 2020

Reviewed by ERIC ESTEVEZ

What Is the International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that is responsible for measures to improve the safety and security of [international shipping](#) and to prevent marine pollution from ships. The [IMO](#) sets standards for the safety and security of international shipping. It oversees every aspect of worldwide shipping regulations, including legal issues and shipping efficiency.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The International Maritime Organization is an agency tasked with improving the security and safety of international shipping.
- One of its key duties is to devise strategies and measures to keep the waterways clean by preventing marine pollution from ships.
- The IMO's governing body, the Assembly, meets every two years, with the first meeting in 1959.
- The IMO is not responsible for enforcing their policies. When a government accepts an IMO policy, it becomes a national law which it is their responsibility to enforce.

Understanding the International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The International Maritime Organization's objectives can be best summed up by its slogan —"Safe, secure and efficient shipping on clean oceans." Basically, the IMO sets policy for international shipping, discouraging shippers from compromising on safety, security and environmental performance to address financial concerns, and encouraging innovation and efficiency.

The IMO is also involved in legal issues matters pertaining to international shipping, such as liability and compensation matters, and the facilitation of international maritime traffic. The IMO's governing body, which is the Assembly that is made up of all 173 member states, generally meets every two years. The Assembly addresses items such as council elections, deciding upon the work program, and looking at the budget.

To break down the workload and to ensure each area of concern of the IMO is getting the attention it deserves, there are five committees tasked with making policies and developing, going over, and overhauling rules and guidelines. Those committees include the Technical Co-operation Committee, the Maritime Safety Committee, the Marine Environmental Protection Committee, the Legal Committee, and the Facilitation Committee. Furthermore, there are seven sub-committees working under these committees.

The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) are some of the vital International Maritime Organization treaties.

Important: IMO's treaty, International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, is regarded as the most crucial treaty regarding safety at sea. The first draft of it was adopted in 1914 following the sinking of the Titanic, before the creation of the IMO.

Special Considerations

It's important to note that the IMO does not implement or enforce policy, in any way. The IMO was created to adopt [policy](#), not enforce it. When governments accept an IMO convention, it agrees to make those policies national law and to enforce those laws. The IMO did develop an audit program that made audits required, effective as of January 2016. However, there is no countermeasure available to the UN if the country is not enforcing the policies set by the IMO. Instead, the IMO provides feedback and advice on a country's current performance.

History of the International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The IMO was established by means of a convention adopted in Geneva in 1948. It entered into force in 1958, and first met in 1959. Based in the United Kingdom, the IMO has 173 member states as of Sept. 2019. It also has Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Intergovernmental Organizations (IGO) as representatives. Among the organizations which have been integral to the policy developments at the IMO is the U.S. Coast Guard.

Beyond shipping, an IMO is also known as an independent marketing organization. This is an organization that works with insurance companies to market its products. The duties of an IMO can include other marketing tasks, such as distribution.

IMO is also shorthand for "in my opinion." What that means is that IMO can simply mean someone is offering their perspective or opinion. However, although IMO is an acronym or abbreviation, it's also considered a slang word that isn't widely used in professional writing.

Related Terms

Maritime Law

Maritime law, also known as admiralty law, is a body of laws that govern private maritime questions, disputes, or offenses and other nautical matters. [more](#)