



## ▶ KEEPING A PROPER LOOKOUT

**Keeping a proper lookout is one of the most vital elements of safe navigational watchkeeping onboard a ship. Failure to maintain a proper lookout may result in a marine incident such as collision, allision, or grounding; some of which may be serious in nature.**

A proper lookout is required by the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972, stating:

*“Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.”*

Additionally, Chapter A – VIII/2 part 4-1 of the STCW Code details the principles to be observed in keeping a navigational watch including Lookout.

To ensure the safety of the vessel, it is important to maintain a proper lookout at all times, whether the vessel is underway or at anchor. This should be done by using all available means (sight, sound, navigational equipment etc.) to maintain situational awareness during a navigational watch. There are three stages of situational awareness:

- Information gathering – to use all sources of information available.
- Understanding information – to interpret the information gathered.
- Anticipation –to anticipate how a situation will develop and change.

A proper lookout helps increase collective awareness and thus assists in correct decisions and actions in navigational situations.

The watchkeeping arrangement to ensure that a proper lookout is maintained at all times should take into consideration several factors, including but not limited to:

- State of weather;
- Visibility and whether there is daylight or darkness;
- Traffic density;
- Proximity of dangers to navigation;
- Attention is necessary when navigating in or near a traffic separation scheme;
- Additional workload including anticipated maneuvers;
- Configuration of the bridge;
- Operational status of bridge equipment.

Depending on the prevailing circumstances, additional lookouts may be called upon.

It is important to ensure that the vessel is always **manned adequately** taking into account the Minimum Safe Manning requirement as well as operational needs.

Whilst the importance of the lookout cannot be undermined, certain risk factors hinder an effective lookout.

Fatigue is one of the risk factors that has been a major causative factor in several marine incidents. The most common causes of fatigue among seafarers are lack of sleep, poor quality of rest, stress, and excessive workload. Fatigue affects judgment and the ability to make decisions efficiently. It is, therefore, essential that Members understand the risk of **Fatigue** and manage it effectively.

Distractions such as non-essential duties, music, emails, cellphones, non-essential personnel on the bridge, and, at times, various [bridge alarms](#), may distract a watchkeeper during navigational watches and thus hinder effective lookout. It is crucial for watchkeepers to always remain vigilant and alert, ensuring that their focus remains solely on the task at hand.

Watchkeepers should ensure that the relieving watchkeepers are suitably rested and fit to take over the watch before formally handing it over. A proper lookout during navigational watch is paramount to the safety of the vessel, her crew, and cargo and must not be compromised.

We welcome feedback on this article or any other Loss Prevention guidance. Please feel free to contact the [Loss Prevention team](#) should you have any further questions.