



# SHIP SAFETY BULLETIN

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Ship Safety Bulletins provide safety-related information to the marine community.  
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**Subject: RISKS LINKED TO USING MEDICINE ON BOARD VESSELS**  
**(amendment 2010-04-19)**

**Purpose**

This bulletin aims to raise awareness about the risks of using certain medicines while working on board a vessel.

**Scope**

This applies to seafarers who use any medicine or product that may affect their ability to work safely.

**Background**

The Transportation Safety Board (TSB) has studied a number of incidents where taking medicine may have affected crew members' performance.

**Seafarers and Medicine**

Using over-the-counter and prescribed medicines may cause side effects that make a person less able to work safely.

Side effects of greatest concern include having:

- trouble seeing;
- trouble with coordination or using one's hands or feet;
- a shorter attention span or trouble making decisions; or
- altered response during emergencies.

**Keywords:**

1. Medication
2. Drugs
3. Prescription

**Questions concerning this Bulletin should be addressed to:**

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Drinking alcohol when taking medicine may make such side effects even worse, which is a source of real concern.

It is easy to get many types of over-the-counter and prescribed medicine, as well as herbal and natural medicinal products. This is why seafarers must tell their doctors or pharmacists that they work on board a vessel and discuss possible side effects. Then, it is the seafarer's responsibility to not work when under the influence of any medicine or product that may make them less able to work safely.

**Remember:** Section 113 of the *Canada Shipping Act, 2001* states that **every** crew member on board a vessel must:

- carry out their duties and functions in a manner that does not jeopardize the safety of the vessel or of any person on board; and
- report to the master any change in their circumstances that could affect their ability to carry out their duties and functions safely.