



QUALSHIP 21 and E-Zero

USCG Port State Control Division (CG-CVC-2)



The U.S. Coast Guard's Port State Control (PSC) program targets substandard vessels to improve maritime safety and environmental protection. To recognize and reward high-performing vessels, the Coast Guard launched the Qualship 21 program on January 1, 2001. This initiative highlights vessels, companies, and operators that demonstrate exceptional compliance with international and U.S. regulations. In 2017, the Coast Guard introduced the E-Zero (Environmental Excellence) designation as an enhancement to Qualship 21, recognizing vessels with exemplary environmental compliance. These programs encourage operators to maintain the highest standards of safety, compliance, and environmental stewardship while promoting sustainable practices to protect the marine environment.

2025 PROGRAM STATISTICS

4,659

QUALSHIP 21 VESSELS

(5,141 in 2024)

605

E-ZERO DESIGNATIONS

(462 in 2024)

22

ELIGIBLE FLAGS

(Consistent with 2024)

2026 UPDATES: QUALSHIP 21 GUIDANCE AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The Coast Guard revised QUALSHIP 21 and E-Zero Programs Work Instruction, CVC-WI-002(2), which updated the guidance and eligibility criteria for the program. These changes entered into force on January 14, 2026 and are intended to enhance the integrity and effectiveness of the programs, which recognize and reward high-quality, foreign-flagged vessels operating in U.S. waters.

- **Enhanced Flag Eligibility:** Flag Administrations must provide evidence that IMO Member State Audit Scheme (IMSAS) Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) were accepted. The final audit report, CAPs, and implementation comments must be available for Coast Guard review upon request.
- **Revised Exit Criteria:** Vessels from companies (including parent and subsidiaries) under DOJ or Coast Guard criminal investigation or prosecution are ineligible. This status lasts for the duration of the investigation plus four years following. The update also expands on "special circumstances" that could lead to removal, including associations with entities subject to U.S. sanctions.
- **Removed Conditional Renewal Eligibility:** The one-year conditional extension for flag administrations exceeding the 1.0% detention threshold is removed. All vessels seeking renewal must now meet all initial eligibility requirements.