

Application & Openings

Does the Association prefer candidates from any particular sector of the Industry??

No, we want the most skilled of the candidates c taking the exam. We have pilots from tugs, cargo, tankers, dredges, the AK Marine Highway, NOAA, USCG, etc.

I saw that there are new background check procedures. Approximately how long will this new process take?

1-2 days once you submit the request to the ClearChecks website. (Be sure to request a copy of the report is sent to seapa.training@gmail.com)

What if I've only worked at two companies, are two letters from former employers going to suffice?

We've changed the requirements on the reference letters from previous application periods. You now need three letters, with at least one of those reference letters from either a current employer representative or immediately previous employer representative, i.e. vessel Captain, or HR Manager, Port Captain, etc. who can testify to the work ethic, interpersonal awareness, and adaptability in the team environment of the applicant. So, only one letter from an employer is required.

Is March 2025 the only time for me to take the exam? I am not eligible/available then. What is the outlook for recruitment in SEAPA in the future?

There is a very high likelihood that we will be holding more entrance exams periodically in the future. We have retirements coming up and more cruise ships expected.

Should I apply once per year?

You can only apply when we open the application process, as announced on our website.

What is the deadline for completing the Physical agility exam and must this be completed in Seattle?

The physical exam must be completed prior to your sim exam date. We will be providing details and logistics to Candidates who pass the written exam, but we are expecting that the physical exams will be completed the day before your sim exam.

What is the maximum age limit to become a federal pilot, assuming one passes the exam.

There is no age limit for the state Pilot license, but you will have to check with USCG for Federal Pilot requirements.

Are there any exceptions for a green card holder with 5 years of piloting experience outside the U.S. who will become a citizen within 2 years?

Sorry, no. You must be a US citizen win a USCG license in order to apply.

How many years of sailing experience are you looking for? I just upgraded to Chief Mate after three and half years of sailing as a Mate. Is this enough sea time to apply?

There is no seatime requirement, just the license requirement.

Can I take the exam even if I don't have all the requirements to be admitted in the program? To be familiar with it in the future.

No, you cannot take the exam until you are qualified to apply

How many candidates is SEAPA taking on this exam period? Is there a specific number of people that SEAPA is looking to accept at the end of this exam?

Everyone who passes the simulator exam will be placed on a list of accepted Candidates. We will offer training positions to the first four trainees immediately in the spring of 2025. After that, it depends on the needs of SEAPA, but we examine our staffing needs twice a year.

Exam & Preparation

How much will the exam cost? How much does it cost to apply?

SEAPA does not charge an application fee. The required background check (see question above) is \$39.99, paid by the applicant directly to ClearCheck. We will be publishing written, simulator and physical exam costs on our website as soon as we know them. All costs will be paid by the Candidate directly to the testing facility or contractor. Final costs will vary by the number of participants, i.e. the more participants, the less expensive the exam. Based on previous SEAPA exams and initial discussions with our contractors, we think it would be prudent to budget approximately \$800 for the written exam (which is a lower cost than when it was held in person) and \$3000 for the simulator exam.

I see some original publication dates on the bibliography list. Will those exam references be updated to the current revisions?

Yes, we will be updating references to current editions.

After we've been graded, will we be able to review our simulator test?

Yes, we will inform Candidates of their results in each skill category following the simulator exam. We want to help you become better mariners, not just for us, but for your own professional development.

Is the simulator exam similar to the NSAP ([Navigation Skills Assessment Program](#))?

It is similar only in that you are in the MITAGS simulator and your skills will be evaluated and graded. Otherwise, no, we are creating original scenarios which measure the skills required to be a successful SEAPA Trainee.

Does MITAGS West offer simulator prep courses for the SEAPA exam or general practice?

Sorry, we do not know the answer to that. You will need to reach out directly to MITAGS.

Can you recommend a platform to use to study for the exam? What resources do Candidates use to study for the written exam? Lapware?

There are many ways that Candidates study. We do not recommend any one source over another, but we do highly recommend studying the bibliography directly.

We've got starlink onboard and USUALLY it maintains a decent connection - if we're disconnected during the exam can we get back in to complete the exam?

Yes, you can log back on to complete the exam. We will publish all the technical requirements beforehand.

Will test results be available immediately? When will we know if we made the cutoff for the simulator exam?

It will take a few days for our team to correlate and interpret all of the exam data, but we will be informing Candidates as to their status as soon as possible so they can make necessary travel arrangements to take the simulator exam.

Will ECDIS be part of the sim exam?

We will publish the exam blueprint so you will know exactly what categories, skills, etc. will be on both the written exam and simulator exam.

It looks like I might be taking the test on the tug. Would the desk in my stateroom be sufficient?

Likely yes, if it meets the published technical requirements.

Great idea for remote proctoring. Where does the exam have to be taken: home office, public library, MITAGS East? What requirements do you need for the exam to go off without a hitch?

We will publish the technical requirements but essentially, you must have good wifi and a private space. You can take it in your home, a cubicle in a library, a private space on a ship, etc.

During the written exam, is there a way to go back to previous questions for those of us who want to?

No, there is no way to go back to a question after you submit your answer. BUT, you will have a very large amount of time for the entire exam, so you should take your time with each question.

How different is this simulator exam from previous exams? Can you give us an example of what type of scenario the simulator exam might look like?

While we cannot publish the exact simulator exam scenario, we can tell you that unlike previous simulator exams, we will be much more transparent as to the skills we expect you to demonstrate. We will be publishing the simulator guidelines, including the categories of knowledge and skills applicable to this exam.

Is the written exam different from the “Core Exam?”

Yes, this written exam is developed by SEAPA for entrance into the training program. The Core Exam is administered by the state of Alaska and is required for a trainee to move from observer to hands-on training at the conn.

The website mentions a "job task analysis" and an updated bibliography. When will these be published?

The JTA is done. As of early November, we are updating the written exam and updating the bibliography to match our new question bank. Our goal is to have the final bibliography published by the end of the year. In the meantime, we recommend studying the main shiphandling texts as a good start.

I spoke with a few Puget Sound applicants who took the last exam for PSP. A few takeaways were technical difficulties starting the online exam in addition to not being to go back and review questions. Will you be using the same online proctor and have these issues been addressed?

The technical issues were when a candidate tried to get online very early, multiple times, and ended up locking themselves out. The exam was reset and then they were able to continue. No other issues were reported. You must ensure that your connection meets the technical requirements so that you have a stable connection.

SEAPA Training Program & Trainee Life

Can you clarify the timelines in each training phase, including the amount of time it takes to become a full Pilot? How long is the time as an unpaid trainee, and how many years as a deputy?

Your training timeline depends on a lot of variables. If you are qualified to be a Deputy Trainee, you can finish your training essentially as quickly as it takes for you to finish the training program. This is typically 2-3 years, depending on if you are working while training, how much previously endorsed Alaska Federal Pilotage you might have, etc. If you are accepted as an Apprentice Trainee, you must be in the training program for 4 years, but there is also an option to for Apprentice trainees to complete the training program in 3 years, but they must do 125% of the required maneuvers at the conn to reduce this time frame from 4 to 3 years.

Once licensed and working as a tonnage-limited Deputy Pilot, the State mandates you to be a Deputy Pilot for a minimum of 3 years, after which you can upgrade to full Pilot.

Do apprentices typically start in Ketchikan or do they have a choice if they want to be in Ketchikan or Juneau?

Trainees have a choice as to where they would like to be based during training. Most Trainees, however, do choose to live in Ketchikan while training because it is typically the first port call for cruise ships, so it is easy to jump on a ship from there.

Can folks do those AMHS trips when still on the waiting to train list?

Unfortunately, no, you are not allowed on the bridge of an AMHS vessel unless you are an active SEAPA trainee or an AMHS employee.

Are you paid during the three-year apprenticeship? What is the pay range for the 3-4 year deputy trainee program? Does the association pay for travel? It is only unpaid for the first 3-4 years, not the entire 6, correct?

SEAPA does not offer a stipend for trainees. But, unlike other piloting groups, we also do not require a buy-in for licensure. Once you are licensed, you are paid for the work you do. SEAPA does not fund travel for trainees, and they are responsible for all their training expenses. Most trainees become very savvy about requesting ships that allow them to cross dock for successive training opportunities. Full Pilots and Deputy Pilots are reimbursed for travel from their dispatch port (Ketchikan or Juneau) to and then from the ship.

Can Apprentices draw their charts to get their Federal Pilotage endorsement in specific areas or do you have to be a Deputy?

Apprentices have the same Federal Pilotage requirements as Deputy trainees and are expected to get all required Federal Pilotage endorsements concurrent with the SEAPA training program.

Can you transition from the apprentice trainee training program to the deputy trainee program if the additional requirements (Seatime) are met while training?

Yes

Does choosing to extend your apprenticeship affect your acceptance into the program? I currently sail month on/off on tugs and serve as the sole provider for our family. Is that kind of schedule something that could be accommodated?

Does the required training period take place between May to September? Then at your leisure otherwise? Do apprentices typically spend the entire May-Oct season training in Southeast?

There is no problem working while going through the apprentice program, as long as you meet the Volume Two requirement of participating in a minimum of one training opportunity per quarter. Most training does occur during the summer, as that is when we have the most traffic, but cargo ships call to SE throughout the year, and you are required to also train on those cargo ships. Many trainees will observe on Alaska Marine Highway ferries during the winter to obtain federal pilotage routes in the winter while prioritizing cruise ship routes and training May-September.

Do most apprentices have another job during the summers or are they fully dedicated to the training program? If they complete the 125% of required moves before the 3 years, would they just continue to keep training until they reach 3 years?

As an apprentice, there is a 3 year minimum commitment. Deputy trainees are not restricted to a minimum timeframe but must complete the entire training program no later than 3 years after taking the state core exam, which transitions them from observer to training at the conn.

What sort of accommodations do trainees have aboard the ships?

Typically a crew room, sometimes a passenger room.

SEAPA Deputy & Full Pilot Life

What is the training schedule like after you are Deputy Pilot? What is the timeline to become a full Pilot?

Once you become a working Deputy Pilot, you have a series of required upgrade maneuvers or check rides to complete. You may complete these in between your dispatched assignments. It takes 3 calendar years to transition from Deputy Pilot to full Pilot.

What about pay once you're done with the deputy program?

Sounds like a great pilot job. Considering that it is a several-year training program, what is the pay range for trainee Deputy Marine Pilot?

The pay is variable depending on how much work there is available for Deputies, how many Deputies share the pie, etc. There is no set pay scale - they are on a fractional share system. During times of economic crisis (2009 Real Estate Bust), Deputies have seen very low income years. Since Covid, on average, Deputies have certainly been able to make as much or more than they ever made sailing.

Would you say a good portion of the work/season is done at night?

Typically, cruise ships depart SE ports in the evening and arrive at the next port in the morning so passengers can enjoy the ports during the day. That said, there are many transits that also occur during the day. When we are on duty and conning in Disenchantment Bay, Glacier Bay, Tracy Arm Fjord, or Misty Fjord, it is during daylight hours.

Are there docking pilots for the ports, or do the SEAPA pilots dock and undock the vessels as well?

No, there are not separate harbor / docking pilots.

Is SEAPA union (MMP)?

There is no required Union Membership, but SEAPA, like most State Pilot Associations, are affiliated with the Masters, Mates, and Pilots.

How are assignments to ships determined?

Dispatch is applied equally amongst the full pilots. Deputy Pilots are dispatched when there are excess assignments available during the summer season.

Are pilots paid individually per trip/movement, or are profits split across the association? What, roughly, can a Deputy Pilot expect to earn over the 4-5 month core season?

In non -Covid years, there have been plenty of opportunities for Deputy Pilots to get dispatched and earn a good living.

Do you have to live in Alaska to be a Pilot here? Where is the best place to base yourself during the season?

You do not need to live in Alaska year-round. During the Summer, Pilots are dispatched from either Juneau or Ketchikan. (Travel will only be reimbursed from Juneau or Ketchikan.) Each city is different and each Pilot chooses the town that best suits their lifestyle.

What determines which pilots maintain the watch through the winter?

It is strictly up to the individual pilot as to whether they want to work the winter season or not.

How does the work-life balance work for having a family?

Many of our trainees/pilots have made it work. It's entirely dependent on your family situation. Please reach out to Seapa.exam@gmail.com, one of our pilots/and or trainees would be happy to discuss with you personally.

Does "in region" mean in SE Alaska i.e Juneau? Does "in region" only include Ketchikan and Juneau, or would Sitka count also?

In region means available for dispatch, from one of our dispatch ports. Ketchikan or Juneau. Sitka is in region but NOT a dispatch port.

What is the Deputy Pilot schedule? What is the Full Pilot schedule? I have heard that it's May 15-Sept 15, and during this time you are on ships 23-27 days per month.

This varies depending on the level of vessel traffic and number of pilots available for dispatch. Deputy Pilots are dispatched during the summer season (typically May 15-Sept 15) as the ship traffic warrants. In addition to the summer, full Pilots can choose to work the summer shoulder & winter seasons. In 2024, Pilots worked approximately 26 days per month in the busy summer season.

Why would someone pick this association when making the choice to be a Pilot?

Great question. Becoming a SEAPA Pilot is not for everyone. What distinguishes SEAPA from other associations is our dispatch schedule and associated lifestyle, the challenging geography, the type of piloting jobs, and the way we manage our organization. Most of us prefer the long off-season with the ability to travel or live anywhere in the world.