

Firm's business boost from embracing Workboat Code Edition 3

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Safety, simplicity and support for new technology. Those were the goals of the new Workboat Code Edition 3 when it was launched by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in 2023.

For Marine Plant Hire (UK) Ltd, based in Dawlish, Devon, and operating around the UK, there has also been a clear bottom-line business benefit.

Ben Wheatley, the company's Marine Superintendent, shares his experience as the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and Workboat Association issue a joint message to the sector, encouraging operators to get ready for the next step of the Code's implementation.

The advice is: check the code, prepare the vessel, book the survey.

Read more about the 13 December 2026 transition date and who it applies to: United message for Workboat Code Edition 3 deadline: 'Check. Prepare. Book'

Ben, whose background is a certified Master, believes embracing the Code is an "investment" that, with forward planning, has strengthened clients' confidence in Marine Plant Hire (UK) Ltd's capabilities and fueled its expansion.

He said:

Essentially, it makes you more commercially resilient – clients are seeing the value in the Code.

Read Workboat Code Edition 3: The safety of small workboats and pilot boats - a code of practice.

Ben explained:

As Workboat Code Edition 3 approached, Marine Plant Hire (UK) Ltd understood how advantageous it would be to lead the sector with vessels properly coded, and the strong position it would put the company in.

We grew and grew rapidly; we invested in tonnage. All of that requires a comprehensive approach to safety management and coding.

Marine Plant Hire (UK) Ltd sprang from its sister company, TMS Maritime, a marine and civil engineering contractor, and now has about 24 vessels. Half of those to which the Code applies have

now been fully certified, including required crew training. The rest are expected to be compliant by 13 December this year.

Plotting the course to confident compliance literally started with Ben getting out calendars – clearly marking when vessels needed certifying, as well as budget and other factors, and treating the process as a distinct part of the business.

Ben accepts there is expense but notes the potential savings and improved crew welfare through safety gains and maintenance efficiencies.

He said:

I personally believe the Workboat Code Edition 3 is guiding operators into a more seamanlike, professional manner – the kind I saw during my career as Master on bigger ships.

We cannot know how many accidents we have not had because of how we improved the vessels and crew skills, such as passage planning. You're also reducing the risk of pollution, incidents and damage – saving you money just from avoiding breakdowns.

“Start now” is Ben's advice:

Get your calendars out with the dates for each workboat and allow for that in your business model so you are not caught out. It's a project.

There's no need to panic. There is lots of help interpreting the Code from industry organisations, like the Workboat Association. Have a call with a surveyor for guidance. Find online guidance from certifying authorities.

He concluded:

Marine Plant Hire (UK) Ltd has decided it's worth making the investment – and the most efficient way to do that is not to start in December 2026.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/firms-business-boost-from-embracing-workboat-code-edition-3>