

Port Meteorological Officer – the KeyMan of Port Meteorological Services

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The Hong Kong Observatory commenced the provision of port meteorological services in Hong Kong in 1892 when an officer was appointed with specific duties of visiting ships in port to collect weather observations recorded as well as to check and calibrate the clocks carried onboard. Before then, most of the weather observations recorded in logbooks or extracts of logbooks were sent to the Observatory by the ship captains or owners, and a small number of them were transcribed by the officers on board the ships when they called at the harbour.

Under the Voluntary Observing Ship (VOS) Scheme of the International Meteorological Organization (IMO), predecessor of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Observatory started to recruit a fleet of locally based voluntary observing ships (VOS) in 1949 to report weather observations over the data-sparse ocean areas. An Observatory officer was designated that year as the Marine Liaison Officer to maintain close contact with the merchant ships and shipping companies, visit the ships in port to correct barometers onboard, issue instructions on weather observations, and provide weather observation log books and a few meteorological instruments on loan to ships for weather reporting. The Marine Liaison Officer was renamed as Port Meteorological Officer (PMO) in 1968.

There are currently more than 100 PMOs from 44 different countries at major ports around the world. The global PMO network can be searched and located using a “Find-a-PMO” Google Earth tool available at http://www.bom.gov.au/jcomm/vos/find_pmo.html or <http://www.jcomm.info/pmos>. With a large number of VOS operating worldwide, all PMOs work to common standards to ensure internationally consistent services. To foster cooperation, the PMOs would meet from time to time to share their knowledge and experience in international workshops or seminars. In case a VOS cannot return to its home port for a long time, or the berthing time at its home port is too short for a PMO visit to be carried out, the shipmaster can also make request to PMOs of other ports to perform checking and calibration of the weather equipment onboard.



PMO (right) checking the barograph
on board a Hong Kong Voluntary Observing Ship



PMO (left) inspecting weather observation reports
onboard a Hong Kong Voluntary Observing Ship