

RESOLUTION MSC.131(75) (adopted on 21 May 2002)
MAINTENANCE OF A CONTINUOUS LISTENING WATCH ON VHF
CHANNEL 16 BY SOLAS SHIPS WHILST AT SEA AFTER
1 FEBRUARY 1999 AND INSTALLATION OF VHF DSC FACILITIES ON
NON-SOLAS SHIPS

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THE MARITIME SAFETY COMMITTEE,

RECALLING Article 28(b) of the Convention on the International Maritime Organization concerning the functions of the Committee,

RECALLING ALSO that regulation 12.3, chapter IV of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974, as amended in 1988, requires that until 1 February 1999 or until such other date as may be determined by the Maritime Safety Committee, every ship while at sea shall maintain, when practicable, a continuous listening watch on VHF channel 16,

RECALLING FURTHER MSC/Circ.803 on Participation of non-SOLAS ships in the Global Maritime Safety and Distress System (GMDSS),

FURTHER RECALLING that the Maritime Safety Committee, at its sixty-ninth session in May 1998, adopted resolution MSC.77(69) on maintenance of a continuous listening watch on VHF channel 16 by SOLAS ships extended the watch requirement until 1 February 2005, taking into account the large number of non-convention vessels yet to be fitted with VHF DSC facilities still using VHF channel 16 for distress and safety purposes,

NOTING that a large number of vessels to which the SOLAS Convention does not apply had not fitted GMDSS equipment by 1 February 1999 and, if watchkeeping was discontinued on VHF channel 16 by SOLAS Convention ships, such non-Convention vessels would, if in distress, be unable to alert Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS)-fitted ships,

NOTING ALSO the time needed for the large number of non-Convention ships being required to carry a radio installation under national legislation, to be fitted with a VHF installation which includes DSC facilities, and to provide adequate GMDSS training for the large number of personnel required to operate the radio equipment of non-Convention ships,

NOTING FURTHER the many parts of the world, not covered by VHF coast stations, where distress alerts can only be received by ships in the vicinity of those in distress,

RECOGNIZING despite the best efforts of member states to encourage seagoing vessels being voluntarily fitted with VHF radio equipment to be fitted also with facilities for transmitting and receiving distress alerts by DSC on VHF channel 70, that there are many areas of the world where this has not occurred, and will not likely occur by 1 February 2005, and that non-convention vessels are likely to continue to use non-DSC VHF equipment as long as it is serviceable, available, and permitted by national legislation,

RECOGNIZING ALSO that there will be a need for an open “short distance frequency” where ships can reach each other for immediate voice inter-ship calling for distress, urgency and safety communications until digital selective calling (DSC) on VHF channel 70 becomes a capability commonly used by both Convention and non-convention ships,

RECOGNIZING FURTHER the capability of GMDSS-fitted ships to simultaneously maintain continuous listening watch on VHF channel 16 and for digital selective calling (DSC) on VHF channel 70,

BEING OF THE OPINION that, for the time being, safety of life at sea would best be served by retaining watchkeeping for GMDSS-fitted ships on VHF channel 16 so that all ships can establish and conduct communications with each other for distress, urgency, safety and general calling,

COGNIZANT that the Maritime Safety Committee has decided that, at the earliest opportunity, VHF digital selective calling on VHF channel 70 will be used universally for initial distress, urgency and safety alerting, using VHF channel 16 as the complimentary radiotelephony channel following the initial alert,

HAVING CONSIDERED, at its seventy-fifth session, the recommendation made by the Sub-Committee on Radiocommunications and Search and Rescue at its sixth session, with respect to the continuation of listening watch by GMDSS-fitted ships,

1. DETERMINES, having regard to SOLAS regulation IV/12.3, that every ship, while at sea, shall continue to maintain, when practicable, continuous listening watch on VHF channel 16, until such time as the Maritime Safety Committee may determine the cessation of this requirement, provided that a re-assessment is undertaken by the Organization no later than 2005;

2. URGES Governments to:

- .1 require all new VHF radio equipment manufactured for, or installed on or after 1 February 1999 on, seagoing vessels to which the 1974 SOLAS Convention does not apply to be fitted with facilities capable of transmitting and receiving distress alerts by DSC on VHF channel 70;
- .2 require all seagoing vessels to which the 1974 SOLAS Convention does not apply, but which are required to carry a radio installation under national legislation, to be fitted with a radio installation which includes facilities for transmitting and receiving distress alerts by DSC on VHF channel 70 no later than 1 February 2005;
- .3 encourage seagoing vessels being voluntarily fitted with VHF radio equipment to be fitted also with facilities for transmitting and receiving distress alerts by DSC on VHF channel 70 no later than 1 February 2005;
- .4 require all vessels being fitted with facilities in accordance with subparagraphs .1 to .3 above, to maintain, when practicable, a continuous listening watch on VHF channel 16 until such time as the Maritime Safety Committee may determine the cessation of this requirement, taking into account that a re-assessment will be undertaken by the Organization no later than 2005; and to require personnel operating such equipment to be adequately trained, taking into account ITU Resolution 343 (WRC-97);

- .5 advise the Organization no later than 2005 on progress in establishing VHF DSC capability ashore and at sea to allow the Maritime Safety Committee to make appropriate decisions; and
 - .6 support the IMO position, as prescribed in the present resolution, at the ITU World Radiocommunication Conference 2003;
3. INVITES Governments to bring this decision to the attention of all seafarers, fishing vessel personnel, shipowners, ship operators, the off-shore industries, radio equipment manufacturers, coast stations and all others involved or who may be involved in search and rescue operations at sea;
4. INVITES FURTHER the Secretary-General to bring this resolution to the attention of the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union.
5. REVOKES resolution MSC.77(69).

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