



INTERNATIONAL
MARITIME
ORGANIZATION

E

4 ALBERT EMBANKMENT
LONDON SE1 7SR
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7735 7611

MSC-FAL.1/Circ.4
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GUIDELINES CONCERNING THE RECOVERY OF DECEASED PERSONS AND DEATH AFTER RECOVERY

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its 110th session (18 to 27 June 2025), and the Facilitation Committee, at its fiftieth session (23 to 27 March 2026), noted the urgent need to raise awareness on the proper transfer of deceased persons to supplement resolution MSC.528 (106) on *Recommended cooperation to ensure the safety of life at sea, the rescue of persons in distress at sea and the safe disembarkation of survivors*, which does not address the deceased, either at the time of recovery or after recovery.

2 The Committees, being aware that the legal status of a deceased person may vary depending on the jurisdiction, and recognizing that this status may be unknown for salvors, approved the Guidelines concerning the recovery of deceased persons and death after recovery, as set out in the annex, and invited Member States and relevant international organizations to:

- .1 pay due respect to culture, practice of the rescued and the local public health policies in handling a deceased person among survivors rescued; and
- .2 pay due consideration to the transfer of bodies between various organizations, in addition to volume III, section 21 of the IAMSAR Manual, as applicable.

3 Member States are invited to bring the guidelines to the attention of all stakeholders concerned.

ANNEX

GUIDELINES CONCERNING THE RECOVERY OF DECEASED PERSONS AND DEATH AFTER RECOVERY

1 Introduction

1.1 Resolution MSC.528(106) on *Recommended cooperation to ensure the safety of life at sea, the rescue of persons in distress at sea and the safe disembarkation of survivors* provides guidance for handling survivors but does not address deceased persons, either at the time of recovery or after recovery.

1.2 Volume III, section 21, of the IAMSAR Manual is dedicated to the handling of deceased persons but does not include guidance on the handing over of bodies between various organizations.

1.3 The Committees recognized that individuals handling deceased persons should respect the deceased's dignity. The rights of survivors under international law, including, as applicable, international human rights law and international refugee law, must be respected.

1.4 Further recognizing that some persons encountered at sea are fleeing dangerous circumstances in their home countries.

2 Recommended actions

2.1 *Rescue Coordination Centre*

2.1.1 Upon hearing the presence of a deceased person among those rescued at sea, the Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) coordinating the rescue operation should render further assistance to the rescuing ship, which may include, as applicable:

- .1 initiating coordination between the ship, flag State, the company, and relevant shore authorities for the swift handover of the deceased persons;
- .2 facilitating telemedical advice to the rescuing ship on the situation of survivors; and deceased persons in order to ascertain their status; and
- .3 assisting in arranging equipment/facilities that the rescuing ship may need, e.g. air transportation of body bags.

2.1.2 An RCC reserves the right not to recommend recovery of the deceased, depending on the circumstances and information provided.

2.2 *Masters of ships/management company*

2.2.1 Upon finding a deceased person among those rescued at sea, the master of the rescuing ship should immediately inform the RCC coordinating the rescue operation, the flag State, the ISM company and, as appropriate, the near-shore authority where the rescued and deceased are planned to be disembarked of the situation.

2.2.2 The master should ensure that the crew of the ship handle the deceased in a manner that respects the deceased person's dignity and, to the extent feasible, the will of the accompanying family member, if any.

2.2.3 The master should assess the situation if there is a risk of contagious disease and seek the advice of medical experts via the coordinating RCC.

2.2.4 If a specific facility or equipment is needed (e.g. body bags), the master of the rescuing ship should seek advice or assistance if the ship is not furnished with the appropriate equipment from the coordinating RCC, including assistance with respect to the possible air transfer of such equipment to the rescuing ship.

2.2.5 Any recovery of deceased persons at sea must take into consideration the circumstances at the scene and the risk to the rescuing ship and crew.

2.3 *Flag States, coastal States and port States*

2.3.1 The flag States, coastal States and port States involved should ensure effective cooperation to facilitate that the ship receives necessary support from the ISM company, the RCC involved and the appropriate authorities of the intended port of disembarkation of the deceased and rescued persons.

2.4 *Port authorities*

2.4.1 Port authorities of the port where the surviving are disembarked should also endeavour to take any accompanying deceased person into the port.

2.4.2 Deceased persons should be treated with dignity and respect, with due consideration for the cultural and religious practices of the deceased.

2.4.3 Port authorities should ensure that due attention is paid to the wishes of any accompanying family member.

2.4.4 Where appropriate and necessary, port authorities should liaise with the local law enforcement agency.

2.4.5 Where appropriate, port authorities should liaise with humanitarian aid agencies (e.g. International Red Cross).
