

Maintaining GMDSS Operator Familiarisation

The purpose of this Marine Notice is to bring to the attention of Masters and Officers aboard ships, the need for all GMDSS-certified personnel to maintain familiarity with the GMDSS equipment fitted to their ship.

This has been recommended in the International Maritime Organization (IMO) circular "Promoting and verifying continued familiarisation of GMDSS operators on board ships" (MSC.1/Circ.1208, 22nd May 2006).

The circular recommends that on-board familiarisation training be incorporated into the ship's safety management system so that personnel joining a vessel receive familiarisation training during their handover. It further recommends that continued familiarisation training be conducted at specific intervals to maintain proficiency on the ship specific equipment.

AMSA encourages all GMDSS-certified personnel aboard ship to maintain their skills by regular use of GMDSS equipment, as recommended by IMO.

Those GMDSS-certified personnel not normally engaged in the operational use and testing of GMDSS equipment aboard ship should draw upon the skills and experience of those GMDSS operators on board who routinely use and test this equipment. Australian vessels refer to Marine Orders Part 27 Appendix 5.

Reference should be made to the ship's GMDSS manufacturers' operating handbooks and any local procedures already developed, which are specific to the vessel.

Where equipment is fitted with built-in test facilities, these should be used during familiarisation, in accordance with the manufacturer's handbook, so as to maintain familiarity with equipment controls.

Digital Selective Calling (DSC)

The IMO recommends that ships frequently test their MF/HF DSC system with a coast station, for both system verification and operator familiarisation. This live testing should be limited to once per week as per IMO recommendations.

ITU regulations specify that the DSC frequencies be reserved for Distress, Urgency and Safety traffic only. It is therefore not possible to use a Routine Priority call on these channels for system verification.

The AMSA HF DSC network provides full automatic testing facilities on all HF Distress, Urgency and Safety channels, using the special test call which enables a safety priority message to be generated by a vessel and automatically acknowledged.

Documentation

Documentation relating to the operation and testing of the GMDSS installation should be located at or close to the GMDSS operating position and be capable of being accessed quickly and easily.

Power supply, alarms and indicators

Operators should also maintain familiarity with the operation of remote alarm panels, locations of remote distress activation panels, the power supply distribution and the positions of switches, circuit breakers, battery charger operation and alarms, and the location of important spare parts (e.g. microphones, fuses, etc).

AMSA surveyors may require ships' staff to demonstrate familiarity with their vessel's GMDSS installation under Port State Control.

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