

MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND WORKS  
DEPARTMENT OF MERCHANT SHIPPING  
LIMASSOL

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To all Owners, Managers and Representatives  
of Ships under the Cyprus flag

Subject: Guidelines for avoiding false  
distress alerts

The excessive number of false distress alerts from ships became a real problem since the mandatory use of GMDSS distress alert equipment. A considerable number of the alerts are transmitted during tests or drills, while in other instances alerts result from inadvertent activation or equipment failure. Nevertheless activation of the "emergency signal" creates problems to Rescue Coordination Centers, coastal states and flag states. Attached to this circular, there are guidelines and instructions as per I.M.O. circ. 127 dated 23.2.95, which Masters, Officers and Seamen, are required to strictly observe and adhere to.

False distress alerts sent deliberately or accidentally and not cancelled immediately according to the attached instructions are considered as "Misuse of distress signals" Chap V Reg 9 Solas 74/78. Offenders are subject to penalties in accordance with article 8 of the law 77/85.



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Director  
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CC: Permanent Secretary Ministry of Communications and Works  
Maritime Attaches  
Diplomatic Missions and Honorary Consular Offices  
Cyprus Shipping Council  
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NE/MP

Companies, Masters and seafarers should, as appropriate:

- . 1 ensure that all GMDSS certificated personnel responsible for sending a distress alert have been instructed and are competent to operate the particular radio equipment on the ship;
- . 2 ensure that the person or persons responsible for communications during distress incidents give necessary instructions and information to all crew members who should know how to use GMDSS equipment to send a distress alert;
- . 3 ensure that during each abandon ship drill instruction is given on how emergency equipment should be used to provide GMDSS functions;
- . 4 ensure that GMDSS equipment testing is only undertaken under supervision of the person responsible for communications during distress incidents;
- . 5 ensure that GMDSS equipment testing or drills are never allowed to cause false distress alerts;
- . 6 ensure that encoded identities of satellite EPIRBs, which are used by SAR personnel responding to emergencies, are properly registered in a database accessible 24 hours per day or automatically provided to SAR authorities (masters should confirm that their EPIRBs have been registered with such a database to help SAR services identify the ship in the event of distress and rapidly obtain other information to help them respond appropriately);
- . 7 ensure that EPIRB, INMARSAT and DSC registration data is immediately updated, if the ship's owner, name, flag or similar information changes, and, necessary action is taken to reprogramme the ships new data in the GMDSS equipment concerned;
- . 8 ensure that, for new ships, positions for installing EPIRBs are considered at the earliest stage of ship design and construction;
- . 9 ensure that satellite EPIRBs are carefully installed in accordance with manufacturers' instructions and using qualified personnel (sometimes satellite EPIRBs are damaged or broken due to improper handling or installation. They must be installed in a proper location to float-free and automatically activate if the ship sinks. Care must be taken that they are not tampered with or accidentally activated. If the coding must be changed or the batteries serviced, manufacturers' requirements must be strictly followed. There have been cases of attaching EPIRB lanyards to the ship so the EPIRB cannot float free; the lanyards are only to be used by survivors for securing the EPIRB to a survival craft or person in water.);

- .10 ensure that EPIRBs are not activated if assistance is already immediately available (EPIRBs are intended to call for assistance if the ship is unable to obtain help by other means, and to provide position information and homing signals for SAR units);
- .11 ensure that if a distress alert has been accidentally transmitted, the ship makes every reasonable attempt to communicate with the RCC by any means to cancel the false distress alert using the procedures given in the appendix;
- .12 ensure that, if possible, after emergency use, the EPIRB is retrieved and deactivated; and
- .13 ensure that when an EPIRB is damaged and needs to be disposed of, or if a ship is sold for scrap or for any other reason a satellite EPIRB will no longer be used, the satellite EPIRB is made inoperable by either removing its battery and if possible returning it to the manufacturer or by demolishing it.

Note: If the EPIRB is returned to the manufacturer it should be wrapped in tin foil to prevent transmission of signals during shipment.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MARINERS AND OTHERS\*\*  
FOR CANCELLING A FALSE DISTRESS ALERT

DSC

1 VHF

- 1 switch off transmitter immediately\*
- 2 switch equipment on and set to Channel 16
- 3 make broadcast to "All Stations" giving name of vessel, callsign and DSC number, and cancel the false distress alert.

Example

All Stations, All Stations, All Stations  
This is NAME, CALLSIGN,  
DSC NUMBER, POSITION.

Cancel my distress alert of  
DATE, TIME, UTC.

= Master, NAME, CALLSIGN,  
DSC NUMBER, DATE, TIME UTC.

2 MF

- 1 switch off equipment immediately\*
- 2 switch equipment on and tune for radiotelephony transmission on 2,182 kHz  
make broadcast to "All Stations" giving the vessel's name, callsign and DSC number, and cancel the false distress alert.

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\* This applies when the false alert is detected during transmission.

\*\* Appropriate signals should precede these messages in accordance with the ITU Radio Regulations chapter N1X.

### Example

All Stations, All Stations, All Stations  
This is NAME, CALLSIGN,  
DSC NUMBER, POSITION.

Cancel my distress alert of  
DATE, TIME, UTC.  
= Master NAME, CALLSIGN,  
DSC NUMBER, DATE, TIME, UTC.

### 3 HF

As for MF but the alert must be cancelled on all the frequency bands on which it was transmitted. Hence, in stage 2.2 the transmitter should be tuned consecutively to the radiotelephony distress frequencies in the 4, 6, 8, 12 and 16 MHz bands, as necessary.

### INMARSAT-C

4 Notify the appropriate RCC to cancel the alert by sending a distress priority message via the same CES through which the false distress alert was sent.

#### Example of message

NAME, CALLSIGN, IDENTITY NUMBER,  
POSITION,  
Cancel my INMARSAT-C distress  
alert of DATE, TIME, UTC  
= Master +

### EPIRBs

5 If, for any reason, an EPIRB is activated accidentally, the ship should contact the nearest coast station or an appropriate coast earth station or RCC and cancel the distress alert.

### General

6 Notwithstanding the above, a ship may use any means available to them to inform the appropriate authorities that a false distress alert has been transmitted and should be cancelled.

7 No action will normally be taken against any ship or mariner for reporting and cancelling a false distress alert. However, in view of the serious consequences of false alerts, and the strict ban on their transmission, Governments may prosecute in cases of repeated violations.