NEW VHF GMDSS CHANNEL REQUIREMENTS

Information Notice 65

Notice to Shipowners, Ship Operators, Managers, Masters,
Owners' Representatives and Recognised Organisations

This Directorate wishes to draw the attention of all concerned to the revised VHF frequency and channel arrangements introduced under Appendix 18 of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Radio Regulations. The IMO Circular MSC.1/Circ.1460/Rev.5, provides updated guidance regarding the implementation of these arrangements.

1. Background and Compliance Requirements

The revised arrangements include changes to maritime VHF channel designations, including the introduction of additional four-digit channel numbers. These changes primarily affect operational communications, such as port operations, Vessel Traffic Services (VTS), navigational and meteorological broadcasts, and other ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communications.

The GMDSS requirements for distress and safety communications remain unaffected.

In accordance with MSC.1/Circ.1460/Rev.5, VHF radiocommunication equipment required under Chapter IV of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), including duplicated equipment, should comply with the revised VHF channel arrangements by the first radio survey scheduled on or after 1 January 2028.

However, it is imperative to note that 1 January 2028 is the formal compliance deadline and should not be interpreted as a date until which no action is required.

Shipowners and operators are reminded that certain coastal administrations and shore-based stations may have already implemented the revised arrangements. Consequently, vessels operating in these areas may experience communication difficulties if their onboard equipment is not compatible.

2. Action to be Taken

Shipowners and operators are therefore strongly encouraged to:

- Verify the manufacturer, model and software/firmware version of all VHF equipment installed on board, including duplicated equipment.
- Contact the equipment manufacturer or authorised service provider to confirm compatibility with the revised channel arrangements.
- Establish whether a software or firmware update is available and, where necessary, arrange for the equipment to be upgraded.

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- Assess the need for equipment replacement where the existing equipment cannot be upgraded.

- Consider the vessel's trading areas and verify whether the relevant coastal administrations, ports and VTS centres have already implemented the revised arrangements.

- Retain appropriate confirmation from the manufacturer or authorised service provider regarding equipment compatibility and any modifications carried out.

Shipowners and operators are advised not to defer these checks until 1 January 2028, but to assess their equipment at the earliest opportunity to ensure continued and effective VHF communications.

Furthermore, it is recalled that, should replacement of the VHF equipment be required, the new equipment shall comply with Directive 2014/90/EU on marine equipment (hereinafter referred to as “the MED”), under item MED/5.1 of the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2025/1533, as amended. The Directorate reminds all concerned of the implementation of the MED and to Merchant Shipping Notices 145 and 153 regarding compliance with the MED. Inter alia, the MED requires that when marine equipment is placed on board a ship flagged in an EU Member State, the Manufacturer’s EU Declaration of Conformity (DoC) covering the equipment shall be maintained on board the ship, and the relevant mark of conformity “the wheel mark” must be physically stamped on the equipment.

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