

# LARGE SCALE RESCUE OPERATIONS AT SEA

GUIDANCE ON ENSURING THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF SEAFARERS AND RESCUED PERSONS



INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF SHIPPING

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This ICS Guidance has been developed in response to the growing number of migrants and refugees being rescued by merchant ships in the Mediterranean. In 2014, this involved the rescue at sea of tens of thousands of people, sometimes as many as 200 persons or more during a single operation. Notwithstanding the immediate impetus for this advice, it is equally applicable in any part of the world where a rescue operation involving large numbers of people at sea may be required.

The rescue of persons in distress is a humanitarian obligation which the shipping industry has always accepted without question. But the attempt by thousands of migrants and refugees to travel to Europe, in craft which are often completely unseaworthy, is a new and different phenomenon to which the entire international community needs to develop solutions urgently. In the meantime, the rescue at sea of such people, should their craft get into distress or their rescue be requested by a Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC), involves very different challenges to conventional rescue operations.

This Guidance is intended to supplement *Rescue at Sea: A Guide to Principles and Practice as Applied to Refugees and Migrants* updated in 2014 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in co-operation with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and ICS.

The humanitarian obligation, placed on nation States and seafarers, to render assistance to persons in distress at sea is enshrined in international maritime law.

Specific provisions can be found in:

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982, Article 98(1) & (2);
- IMO International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) 1974 as amended, Chapter V, Regulations 7 and 33; and
- IMO International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR), 1979 as amended.

The fundamental principle is that nation States and ships have an obligation to assist persons in distress at sea, regardless of their nationality, status or situation. The practicalities of meeting the obligations under these international Conventions are described in the *International Aeronautical and Maritime SAR Manual (IAMSAR)* Volumes I-III.<sup>1</sup> The matters described in IAMSAR Volume III are of particular relevance to shipping companies and ship's Masters.

The ICS guidance *Recovery of Persons from the Water* provides complementary guidance on developing ship specific plans and procedures (as required by new SOLAS Regulation III/17-1) and can be downloaded free of charge via the ICS website.

## Important Note

Even if so requested by an RCC or other shore officials, the Master has no authority, obligation or responsibility to become involved in listening to, acting upon or communicating information concerning the legal status of rescued persons or applications for asylum.

The sole responsibility of the Master and the crew is to maintain the safety and, as far as practicable, the health and wellbeing of rescued persons, and cooperate in their safe disembarkation.

# 2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This booklet provides guidance for shipping companies and Masters to ensure the safety and security of crews who may be involved in rescuing large numbers of persons at sea, as well as the people they rescue.

ICS recognises that for many companies and ships, this Guidance may complement existing practices and procedures. For others this Guidance may assist with the development of company practices and procedures to support Masters and crews that may have to participate in large scale rescue operations.

**Appendix A** provides a Checklist for company preparations to support Masters.

**Appendix B** provides a Checklist for Masters involved in rescue operations.



<sup>1</sup> Jointly published by IMO and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).





## 3. PREPARATIONS

The need to rescue multiple persons can make the operation particularly challenging. Ships should therefore be prepared for this eventuality. In making advance preparations, experience has shown that effective procedures, supported by regular drills, will prepare Masters and crews to respond safely and to manage successfully rescue operations at sea.

### 3.1 PLANS AND PROCEDURES

All ships are required under SOLAS Regulation III/17-1 to have plans and procedures in place to recover casualties from the sea. However, companies with ships operating in areas where the probability of being involved in a large scale rescue may be higher than normal are particularly advised to develop additional plans and procedures for their ships.

These plans should provide procedures for:

- Rescuing large numbers of personnel directly from the sea or from other craft;
- Accommodating and managing rescued persons on board;
- Managing the security of the ship with rescued persons on board; and
- Post disembarkation actions.

Experience has shown that each rescue will have unique features, and even well made plans will need to be adapted to fit the situation. Masters should be given the flexibility to assess risks and implement changes as required.

### 3.2 TRAINING AND FAMILIARISATION

The STCW Convention<sup>2</sup> stipulates requirements for seafarer training related to Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. The company should ensure that individual seafarers, on being assigned to any of its ships, are familiarised with their specific duties and with all ship arrangements, installations, equipment, procedures and ship characteristics that are relevant to their general and emergency duties.

### 3.3 ADDITIONAL STORES

The ship's provisions and equipment, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), should be sufficient to support small or even medium scale rescue activities. However, in order to support the potential for a large scale rescue operation, and to avoid excessively depleting provision and equipment levels required by ship's personnel for the safe operation of the vessel, it is recommended that consideration be given to providing the following additional stores and equipment:

General equipment, including:

- Food and drinking water;
- Survival bags;
- Plastic sheeting;
- First aid and medical supplies; and
- Chlorine based cleaning products and equipment.

PPE (for crew, in order to protect against potential risks to health) including:

- Additional life jackets and flotation devices for crew (in case of infection or contamination);
- Anti-bacterial gel/sanitiser in individual packages, and dispensers;
- Fluid-resistant, impermeable long sleeve coveralls or coats with long sleeves;
- Gloves (both cotton/fabric and latex or nitrile);
- Respiratory protection; and
- Eye protection.

<sup>2</sup> IMO International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978 as amended in 2010.

## 4. CONDUCTING A LARGE SCALE RESCUE OPERATION

In situations where a decision is taken to stand by a craft rather than to conduct a rescue or recovery operation, the initial decision should be reviewed in light of changing circumstances and conditions.

A review of circumstances should include:

- The immediacy of the threat to life of the people on the vessel or craft;
- The risks posed to ship, crew and people to be rescued during a large scale rescue operation;
- The preparedness of the ship for embarkation; and
- The proximity of Search and Rescue (SAR) services to the situation.

### 4.1 RESCUE PLANNING

The practicalities of conducting rescue at sea are covered in detail in IAMSAR Volume III and should also be addressed in ship specific plans and procedures for the recovery of persons from the water. Company risk assessment techniques should be used when considering adapting plans and procedures for the particular situation facing the ship and the crew.

### 4.2 PREPARATIONS FOR THE RESCUE

Prior to commencing any rescue operations, the safe navigation of the ship should be considered and other vessels in the area advised. As appropriate, navigation lights and shapes as required by the IMO Collision Regulations<sup>3</sup> should indicate the current status of the ship.

There may be limited time to complete preparations before a rescue is initiated.

So far as practicable, a thorough briefing of all ship's crew regarding the anticipated operation should be conducted. Prior to the start of operations, crew with specific duties should be additionally briefed and any questions addressed. Equipment expected to be used during rescue operations should be assembled and prepared in the anticipated locations for use. Emergency and first aid equipment should be readily available.

The priority should be to ensure that every crew member involved in a rescue is properly prepared and equipped. The safety of the ship's own crew will remain the primary concern of the Master. This requirement should never be compromised in any attempt to rescue people, nor later while rescued persons remain on board nor during their disembarkation.

Crew members should have access to appropriate PPE at all times and use it whenever necessary.

### 4.3 GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONDUCTING THE RESCUE

The critical factor when dealing with large scale rescue at sea will be the number of people involved. This can make prioritising survivors for rescue, transportation in lifeboats or rescue boats, and embarkation very challenging and potentially hazardous. To help manage the situation and ensure the safety - and security - of all involved, the Master and crew should:

- Where practical, instruct those awaiting rescue to remain in their craft unless ordered otherwise;
- Remain calm and display appropriate authority and control in all communications with the rescued persons;
- Wear uniform (or clothing that clearly identifies those who are part of the ship's crew);
- Take measures to keep those rescued calm, in order to ensure the safety of all involved. Keeping family units together will help with this; and
- Endeavour to recover persons as swiftly as the conditions and the situation allow. As much order as possible should be maintained to ensure that the operation is carried out effectively.

### 4.4 EMBARKATION OF RESCUED PERSONS

Embarkation is the most challenging phase of a rescue operation. Masters and crew should use ship specific plans and procedures, adapted for the circumstances, to:

- Safely embark rescued people;
- Ensure that embarkation is carefully controlled. This process will be determined by the capacity of rescue boats, lifeboats and other embarkation methods;
- So far as is possible, control what items are brought on board;
- Record numbers of adults, children and those requiring medical attention. This should not hold up the process of embarkation, and if necessary should only be conducted once all rescued persons are on board; and
- Document the embarkation process to create a statement of facts.

By managing the embarkation effectively, Masters and crew will remain in control of the situation. They will then be better placed to manage their own safety and the security of the ship.

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<sup>3</sup> IMO Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972.



## 5. MANAGEMENT OF RESCUED PERSONS

Those rescued should be treated as humanely as the design and limitations of the ship and the capability of the crew allow. The ability to protect rescued persons from adverse weather conditions (including sun and heat) should be advised to Rescue Coordination Centres (RCCs) as a priority, to ensure appropriate disembarkation at the earliest opportunity.

The Company Security Officer (CSO) and its Ship Security Officers (SSOs) may wish to consider addressing the points listed below in the Ship Security Plan required by the IMO ISPS Code.<sup>4</sup>

### 5.1 ACCOMMODATION AND MANAGEMENT

A carefully considered plan for the accommodation and management of rescued persons will assist the crew in maintaining control, and will help to preserve the safety and security of the ship and crew.

Initial actions following embarkation should include:

- Moving the embarked persons quickly to a pre-determined area (a controlled environment). Ship's personnel who work in and monitor the area should wear uniform or suitably identifying clothing, so far as this is consistent with the need to use PPE, and display appropriate authority;
- Recording the total number, age and gender, and medical condition of those rescued;

- Reassuring those embarked that they will be taken to a place of safety; and
- Providing shelter, food, water and medical attention, subject to the capabilities and limitations of the ship.

When considering the accommodation and management of rescued persons after embarkation, the following should be taken into account where practicable:

- Accommodating the sick and/or injured separately;
- Accommodating women, unaccompanied children, families and single men in separate groups and/or areas;
- Accommodation should be well ventilated;
- Victualing arrangements; and
- Location of sanitary facilities.

Establishing trust through good communication with the people embarked will enable the crew to identify any individuals who may be in a position of authority, or respect, to help the crew to manage the rescued persons.

<sup>4</sup> IMO International Ship and Port Facility Security Code, required under SOLAS Chapter XI-2.





## 5.2 MEDICAL CARE

The *International Medical Guide for Ships*<sup>5</sup> provides detailed guidance on diagnosing, treating and preventing health problems in seafarers. Chapter 28 provides specific guidance on medical matters relating to rescued persons.

Reference should be made to the *International Medical Guide for Ships*, Chapter 23 which includes guidance on managing infectious diseases and/or viruses, and the latest 'International Travel and Health' information and updates from the World Health Organization (WHO) which can be accessed via the WHO website.<sup>6</sup> Such information may provide an early indication of particular health risks and inform the development of on board safety precautions and procedures.

## 5.3 SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Preventing the spread of sickness or illness should be a priority. Any outbreak of illness or spread of infection will harm those rescued and pose a risk to the crew. Ship specific plans and procedures should provide detail on protecting the health of the crew and take account of the WHO *Guide to Ship Sanitation*, Section 8.

Some basic precautions will include:

- Provision of sanitary facilities on at least a 1:50 basis;
- Separation of sanitary provisions from food and water supplies;
- Separation of healthy rescued persons from those that are sick, as much as possible;
- Preparedness to provide a suitable location (preferably refrigerated) to store the bodies of any recovered persons who subsequently do not survive;
- Crew should make use of the following, if available, on board:
  - Fluid-resistant, impermeable long sleeve coveralls;
  - Latex or nitrile gloves;
  - Respiratory protection; and
  - Eye protection.

<sup>5</sup> Third Edition, 2007, jointly published by the World Health Organization (WHO), IMO and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

<sup>6</sup> Particular advice about the Ebola virus, relevant to ships and crew, can be found on the ICS website, as well that of IMO.





Crew should make use of a sanitiser from suitable dispensers on entry and departure from areas accommodating rescued persons, and remove and quarantine any clothing or PPE used, including footwear.

Appropriate disposal methods for material contaminated with human waste and bodily fluids should be carried out in accordance with the latest WHO *Guide to Ship Sanitation* and the ship's Garbage Management Plan (as required by Annex V of the IMO MARPOL Convention). This will involve the quarantining on board of any PPE, bedding, clothing and other materials considered to be contaminated, prior to appropriate disposal ashore. Appropriate annotations will be required in the ship's Garbage Record Book (also required by MARPOL Annex V).

## 5.4 SECURITY OF THE CREW AND SHIP

Following large scale rescue operations, the number of embarked persons may likely outnumber the ship's crew. For this reason, careful management is essential for the safety, security and wellbeing of all involved.

Appropriate security measures in accordance with ship specific plans and procedures should be implemented to limit risk to crew and ship safety, the possibility of rescued persons becoming stowaways or, in extremis, even attempting to hijack the ship and its crew. As soon as any concerns become apparent the Master must request assistance through a Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC).

Security procedures should be put in place to:

- Limit access to sensitive and/or dangerous areas of the ship and contain embarked personnel within the intended accommodation or other designated areas;
- Periodically verify the security of any areas with limited access;
- Limit the personal items that the rescued persons bring on board;
- Establish controlled areas in order to facilitate supervision and monitoring. Different zones could be demarcated by rope or tape. Where practical and safe, physical barriers including locks and chains may be used;



- Enforce strictly any policies relevant to the safety of the ship and the crew, for example 'no smoking' and use of naked lights, particularly on board tankers or vessels where hazardous cargoes are being carried. On tankers, for example, this may include enforcement of policies regarding use of phones and other electronic devices that carry the risk of ignition, and the Master may decide on a policy of confiscation;
- Establish watches and plans for monitoring those embarked. This may involve continuing to count rescued persons at regular intervals;
- Ensure that crew members whose role and responsibility is the monitoring and supervision of embarked personnel wear uniform or clothing that identifies them as crew. The wearing of uniform will help to display appropriate authority and to maintain control. However, the use of PPE is essential and if found to be incompatible with the wearing of uniform the correct use of PPE should take precedence;
- Limit the availability of information to rescued persons regarding security routines, the number of crew, any other information about the ship, or the involvement of coastguard or naval vessels;
- Control the taking and sharing of pictures of the rescue operation;
- Establish actions to be taken in the event that a fight or dispute arises between the rescued persons; and
- Manage potential conflict by the use of appropriate accommodation and segregation wherever practical.

## 6 DISEMBARKATION OF RESCUED PERSONS

A prolonged wait for disembarkation will make the challenges of accommodating and managing rescued persons more difficult for Masters and crew.

### 6.1 DISEMBARKATION IN PORT

Primary responsibility for arranging the disembarkation of those rescued lies with the State responsible for the SAR region in which the rescue took place. Disembarkation should occur in a place of safety at the earliest opportunity with reference to:

- The particular circumstances of the ship, including the ability to accommodate and treat rescued persons appropriately; and
- The need to minimise deviation from the planned voyage.

Responsibility for arranging disembarkation does not lie with the company or Master. Any screening that may be required by the Port State or its officials should not be undertaken by the crew, nor should it delay disembarkation.

### 6.2 DISEMBARKATION AT SEA

The transfer of rescued persons to another vessel may be lengthy and potentially hazardous. Should such a procedure be proposed, Masters should discuss the planned operation as soon as possible with the appropriate RCC and with the intended transfer vessel(s) to determine a plan that minimises risk to crew and the rescued persons.

### 6.3 POST DISEMBARKATION ACTIONS

Following disembarkation, in order to support the ongoing safety and security of the crew, it is important that the following actions take place:

- An extensive search for stowaways on board immediately after the transfer/disembarkation of rescued persons; and
- Effective cleaning with hot water, detergent and disinfecting solution of areas that accommodated rescued persons, supported sanitary arrangements, or which were used for the storage of any non-survivors.

### 6.4 CREW WELFARE CONSIDERATIONS AND ACTIONS

Following involvement in a rescue operation the health and welfare of the ship's crew should be monitored in order to detect any latent physical or mental effects. A number of diseases and infections have a prolonged incubation period and ongoing health monitoring should reflect this.

Seafarers may experience stress or psychological after effects following a rescue operation. The full psychological impact on the Master and/or crew from involvement in a rescue operation may only become apparent after the passage of time, perhaps even after the seafarer has left the vessel. The company and ship's plans and procedures should address this possibility, with appropriate support and monitoring of crew members.

Fatigue may be an issue if not properly managed after a rescue operation. Any short term disruption to rest and work patterns should be limited to that which is absolutely necessary.

Companies should be aware that following large scale rescue operations there may be adverse responses from the Master and crew which will need to be acknowledged and managed by companies, either within existing policies and procedures, or on a case by case basis.



## APPENDIX A

### COMPANY CHECKLIST FOR A LARGE SCALE RESCUE OPERATION AT SEA

1. The company should consider adapting ship specific plans and procedures for rescue of persons from the water, taking account of the following:
  - a. Safe use of ship lifesaving appliances and PPE to support large scale rescue operations;
  - b. Familiarisation of crew with procedures for the conduct of large scale rescue operations;
  - c. On board training and drills for large scale rescue/recovery operations;
  - d. Sheltered and appropriate accommodation of large number of rescued persons;
  - e. Security of the ship during large scale rescue operations; and
  - f. Post disembarkation clean up actions and contaminated waste disposal.
2. Ensure that company medical, health and safety, and welfare procedures are adapted to include any special considerations following large scale rescue operations at sea.

#### ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- UNHCR/IMO/ICS *Rescue at Sea: A Guide to Principles and Practice as Applied to Refugees and Migrants*;
- ICS *Recovery of Persons from the Water: Guidelines for the Development of Plans and Procedures*;
- IMO *Guidelines for the Development of Plans and Procedures for the Recovery of Persons from the Water* (MSC.1/Circ.1447);
- IMO *Guide to Recovery Techniques* (MSC.1/Circ.1182);
- IMO *Guide for Cold Water Survival* (MSC.1/Circ.1185/Rev.1);
- WHO *Guide to Ship Sanitation*; and
- WHO/IMO/ILO *International Medical Guide for Ships*.



## APPENDIX B

### MASTER'S CHECKLIST FOR A LARGE SCALE RESCUE OPERATION AT SEA

It is recognised that time may not permit the completion of all preparations in accordance with ship specific plans and procedures before a rescue operation is necessary.

However, the following preparations for a large scale rescue operation should be completed to the extent that time allows, with ship and crew safety as the principal concern:

1. Determine if a distress situation exists based on the information available to the Master;
2. Plan a rescue in accordance with ship specific plans and procedures, modified as appropriate by the Master for the situation;
3. Make preparations for a rescue including:
  - a. Approach method – it is recommended that rescue is normally conducted using a rescue boat or lifeboat, rather than bringing the ship alongside the craft in distress; and
  - b. Embarkation plan – to ensure the calm and orderly embarkation of all persons to be recovered;
4. Conduct the rescue:
  - a. Carry out ship specific plans and procedures – focus on crew safety, appropriate PPE and good communications; and
  - b. Establish trust – instil calm by reassuring rescued persons and, if available, provide life vests, water and nutrition;
5. Prepare accommodation:
  - a. Prepare a safe and secure area of the ship and provide crew with appropriate PPE (at least a disposable mask and gloves);
  - b. Be prepared to segregate women/children and any obviously sick or injured persons but also allow for family groups to remain together;
  - c. Count the number of people on board, noting children and medical cases;
  - d. Maintain sanitary conditions to protect the health of rescued persons and the crew; and
  - e. Provide water, nutrition and basic medical care within the capabilities and limitations of the ship;
6. Plan security:
  - a. Establish watch routines for monitoring security;
  - b. Limit access to the ship and dangerous areas; and
  - c. Remain vigilant to potential conflict between rescued persons;
7. Engage with the RCC to agree a place of safety for disembarkation based on the particular circumstances of the rescue and the planned voyage of the ship;
8. Plan post disembarkation actions:
  - a. Clean and disinfect areas of the ship used for accommodation, sanitary provisions and medical care;
  - b. Check for stowaways; and
  - c. Dispose of used PPE and any contaminated waste appropriately.

#### ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- IMO/ICAO *IAMSAR Volume III*;
- UNHCR/IMO/ICS *Rescue at Sea: A Guide to Principles and Practice as Applied to Refugees and Migrants*;
- ICS *Recovery of Persons from the Water: Guidelines for the Development of Plans and Procedures*;
- WHO *Guide to Ship Sanitation*; and
- WHO/IMO/ILO *International Medical Guide for Ships*.





## INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF SHIPPING

The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) is the principal international trade association for the shipping industry, representing shipowners and operators in all sectors and trades. ICS membership comprises 36 national shipowners' associations in Asia, Europe and the Americas representing over 80% of world merchant tonnage. ICS is concerned with all technical, legal, employment affairs and policy issues that may affect international shipping.

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