



Ref. T2/6.04

MSC/Circ.861  
22 May 1998**MEASURES TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF FALSE DISTRESS ALERTS**

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its sixty-ninth session (11 to 20 May 1998), being concerned with the high percentage of false distress alerts which have been experienced in many GMDSS radio systems during the last years, noted the significant increase in the number of SOLAS convention ships which will be fitted with GMDSS equipment prior to 1 February 1999.

2 The Committee also noted the large number of non-convention ships which are expected to fit GMDSS equipment in the coming years and recognized that false distress alerts already impose a considerable burden on Rescue Co-ordination Centres (RCCs) and divert SAR resources away from real distress situations and therefore also reduce the confidence of seafarers.

3 Recognizing also that the numbers of false distress alerts could be even more severe in the coming years due to the expected large increase in the number of GMDSS installations, unless effective measures to reduce or eliminate false distress alerts are implemented, and being aware that investigations into false distress alerts indicate that a large portion of these are caused by a combination of operational errors and equipment being inadequately protected against initiation of false distress alerts, the Committee therefore considered that measures were urgently needed to eliminate or reduce the danger of false distress alerts being transmitted as a consequence of the combination referred to. To this effect, it decided to urge Member Governments:

- .1 to ensure that all GMDSS equipment being manufactured and installed on ships comply fully with the latest IMO performance standards including, where relevant, a dedicated and protected distress button as the only means of initiating a distress alert;
- .2 to require shipowners when ordering GMDSS equipment for their ships to seek and ensure from manufacturers that such equipment complies fully with the latest IMO performance standards;
- .3 to encourage manufacturers of GMDSS radio equipment to investigate as a matter of urgency the possibilities for modifying equipment not fitted with a dedicated and protected distress button as the only means of initiating transmission of a distress alert, so as to be fitted with such a facility, and to advise Governments and shipowners on the suitability for such modifications;
- .4 to consider establishing requirements for GMDSS radio equipment not fitted with a dedicated and protected button as the only means of distress alerting to be modified so as to incorporate such facilities;
- .5 to encourage manufacturers also to co-operate so as to agree on common standards and simplification of operating equipment design, especially related to the facilities and layout for initiating, and responding to, distress alerts;
- .6 to encourage shipowners and manufacturers further to provide facilities and information enabling personnel having radio duties to familiarize themselves with the equipment involved and how it should be operated in a correct manner, including the avoidance of transmitting false distress alerts;

- .7 to take appropriate measures to ensure compliance with all relevant requirements applicable to ships fitted with GMDSS equipment, including that ships to which such requirements apply, be fitted with a dedicated and protected distress button; and
- .8 to bring COMSAR/Circs. 2 and 12 concerning the operational performance of the DSC system to the attention of shipowners, ship masters and seafarers.

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