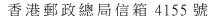海 事 處
香港統一碼頭道 38 號
海港政府大樓

香港郵政總局信箱 4155 號

**MARINE DEPARTMENT**
HARBOUR BUILDING
38 PIER ROAD
HONG KONG

G.P.O. BOX 4155
HONG KONG

網 站　WEB SITE : https://www.mardep.gov.hk
本處檔號 OUR REF.　: SD/S 800/8
電話號碼 TEL. NO.　: (852) 2852 ~~4503~~ 4510*
傳真號碼 FAX NO.　: (852) 2545 0556

**30 June 2020**

To: All Masters, Ship Security Officers, Company Security Officers of Hong Kong registered ships, Hong Kong Shipowners, Hong Kong Ship Managers and Hong Kong Ship Operators

## Ship Operators Security and Quality Advisory No. 59

## Ship Security Alert System (SSAS)

### False SSAS Alert

SOLAS regulation XI-2/6 requires ships to be fitted with a SSAS which, when activated, shall initiate and transmit a ship-to-shore security alert (security alert) to a competent authority designated by the Administration, indicating that the security of the ship is under threat or it has been compromised.

2.　According to our records, from January 2020 to April 2020 there were **42 SSAS alerts** received, excluding initial or periodical test alerts, among which **41 (97.6%)** were revealed to be **"false security alert"** after verifying with the respective Company Security Officers (CSOs).

3.　The most common causes that a ship may transmit a "false security alert" are either due to technical failure of the SSAS or inadvertent activation of the system. In either case, since SOLAS regulation XI-2/6.2.3 provides that SSAS, when activated, shall not raise any alarm on board the ship, the inadvertently activated system is seldom reset by the shipboard personnel to stop the continuous transmission of security alert. Recently a "false security alert" was transmitted in this way when the shore-based service engineer was performing retrofit of the shipboard Immarsat-C for SSAS.

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4.        This circular letter is to draw the attention of shipowners, ship managers, company security officers, masters and ship security officers of Hong Kong-registered ships to strictly follow the procedures and requirements stipulating in the Ship Security Plan (SSP) when testing and activating SSAS. Companies are also recommended to issue standing instruction or reminder to shore-based service company engaging in onboard SSAS installations, repairs & inspections to avoid inadvertent activation of the system.

5.        It should be emphasized that, according to SOLAS Chapter XI-2 Reg. 6, the flag State is obligated to immediately notify the State(s) in the vicinity of which the ship is presently operating when receiving notification of a ship security alert. In this regard, the CSO shall verify with the ship and promptly confirm to HKMD whether the alert is genuine or false after the SSAS alert signal is received by him. Late respond is unacceptable and can cause serious consequences.

## Authorization of deputy CSO

6.        As per the IMO MSC Circular-1132, the position of CSO is a 24-hour responsibility. However, the CSO does not have to directly undertake all the duties and responsibilities of the CSO and such delegation is acceptable.

7.        To ascertain a quick response from the companies in critical situation including confirmation of SSAS alert status, companies are recommended to authorize deputy CSO and update us with the details.

## Testing of SSAS

8.        The SSAS should be tested for its proper function as an operational SSAS is crucial in a real emergency. All ship masters, CSOs, SSOs and companies should pay particular attention to the guidelines for the test procedures of SSAS installed on Hong Kong registered ships. The SSAS testing guidelines is available on MD Marsec website: https://marsec.mardep.gov.hk/en/ssa_system.html

9.        According to the guidelines, notification of initial installation testing of SSAS shall be made to the ~~Security and Quality Assurance (SQA)~~ Cargo Ships Safety (CSS)* section (~~sqa@mardep.gov.hk~~ mms@mardep.gov.hk*) 3 working days before the testing. And for periodical testing of SSAS, CSO, SSO or ship's master should inform the ~~SQA~~ CSS* section with copy to the Hong Kong Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (HKMRCC) (hkmrcc@mardep.gov.hk) by email 1 to 2 hours before testing.

10.　　　According to our records, from January 2020 to April 2020 there were **994 SSAS test alerts** received, among which **329 (33%)** were found "**without prior notification**" to HKMD. All ship masters, CSOs, SSOs and shipping companies are hereby reminded that, as per the IMO MSC Circular-1155, companies must ensure to notify the flag State well ahead of the test so that it should not be misunderstood as a real emergency.

11.　　　HKMD will keep in view the situation of both **"false security alerts"** and **"test alerts without prior notification"** and will consider further actions if the situation is not improved.

12.　　　Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

*No signature on website copy*

(Eric W.C. LEE)
Senior Surveyor of Ships/
Security & Quality Assurance Section
*for* Director of Marine