ALERTING OF SEARCH AND RESCUE AUTHORITIES

1. The Maritime Safety Committee, at its seventieth session (7 to 11 December 1998), approved operating guidelines for masters of ships in distress and urgency situations, given in the annex, for use in training shipmasters, officers and key shore-based personnel in SAR procedures, to ensure early notification of SAR authorities when involved in emergency situations.

2. Member Governments are invited to bring the annexed guidelines to the attention of shipmasters, officers, key shore-based personnel and any other parties concerned.
ANNEX

ALERTING THE SEARCH AND RESCUE AUTHORITIES

1. The need for the earliest possible alerting of the search and rescue (SAR) co-ordination authority to maritime emergencies cannot be over-emphasised.

2. It is essential to enable shore-based facilities to respond without delay to any situation which constitutes, or has the potential to constitute, a danger to life. Time lost in the initial stages of an incident may be crucial to its eventual outcome. It cannot be regained.

3. Factors to be considered include position (in relation to hazards and to shore-based or other SAR units); time of day; weather conditions (actual & forecast); the number of persons at risk or potentially at risk; specific assistance required, etc.

4. It is always best to consider the 'worst-case scenario' and to alert the SAR organisation accordingly. Depending on the circumstances, the co-ordinating authority may choose to alert or despatch SAR facilities as a precautionary measure and/or to reduce transit times. If assistance is not subsequently required, any such positive response can be easily curtailed. But time lost through delays in notification can never be regained.

5. It is therefore essential that the SAR co-ordinating authority be informed immediately of:

   .1 all maritime SAR incidents;
   
   .2 any situation which may develop into a SAR incident; and
   
   .3 any incident which may involve or lead to danger to life, the environment or to property which may require action from the SAR services and/or other authorities.
Operating guidance for masters of ships in distress or urgency situations

6. The following diagram shows standard procedures for distress/urgency message routeing. It is for guidance only, and does not preclude the use of any and all available means of distress alerting.

Is vessel to be abandoned? 

Yes

Transmit distress call

No

Is immediate help needed? 

Yes

Notify RCC

Response received

Yes

Communicate with RCC and SRUs

No

Switch on EPIRB and SART immediately

Response received

Yes

Communicate with RCC and SRUs

A potential problem exists

Is immediate help needed? 

No

Embark in survival craft with VHF, EPIRB and/or SART, if possible

Response received

Yes

Communicate with RCC and SRUs

To be considered in conjunction with IMO publication 969 - GMDSS Operating Guidance for Masters of Ships in Distress Situations (COM/Circ.108 of 23 January 1992.)
Operating guidance for masters of ships observing another vessel apparently in danger

7 The following diagram shows suggested procedures for reporting concerns about the safety of another vessel (fire, smoke, adrift, navigating towards a danger, etc.).

- Try to communicate.
  - Yes
    - Inform the other ship about your concern and try to obtain further information.
    - Are you satisfied?
      - Yes
        - After verifying that assistance is not required, proceed on passage.
      - No
        - Try to obtain the maximum of information about the other vessel (name, C/S type, position, course, speed) and inform the RCC
          - Sometimes the master of a vessel in distress does not immediately contact the RCC
            - Try to keep track of the reported vessel (radar, visual and comm's), unless otherwise directed by RCC