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USE OF SMOKE HELMET-TYPE BREATHING APPARATUS

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its seventy-seventh session (28 May to 6 June 2003), having taken into account the fact that, with the entry into force of the revised SOLAS chapter II-2 on 1 July 2002, new ships may no longer be fitted with smoke-helmet type breathing apparatus and that ships built prior to the entry into force of the new requirements will still be able to carry this type of equipment, recognized that owners and operators who are still allowed to fit ships with smoke helmet-type breathing apparatus as part of the minimum fire-fighting equipment inventory will encounter the following problems:

- .1 the equipment is not easy to use and requires significant training and very few, if any, shore-based training centres continue to provide instruction in the use of this equipment; and
- .2 particular difficulties are experienced when co-ordinating simultaneous use of both self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) and smoke helmets to form an effective fire-fighting party.

2 The Committee additionally recognized that, compared to an SCBA, smoke helmet-type breathing apparatus have the following operational drawbacks/risks:

- .1 toxic fumes and smoke could be introduced into the air supply if the bellows are not placed in a safe environment;
- .2 there is a large commitment on personnel resources if the equipment is to be used effectively. This situation is significantly exacerbated by reduced crew numbers;
- .3 there is a high risk that the air supply line may be damaged or trapped;
- .4 the equipment restricts freedom of movement since the entry and exit points must be the same;
- .5 the range of operation is limited by the length of hose; and
- .6 maintenance and procurement of spare parts is difficult.

3 Member Governments are invited to bring the above information on the problems associated with the use of smoke helmet-type breathing apparatus to the attention of shipowners, shipoperators, shipmasters and other interested parties of the shipping industry and to recommend that existing ships be fitted with additional SCBAs to replace, or make redundant, existing smoke helmet type breathing apparatus where these form part of the minimum equipment required.