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APPLICATION OF SOLAS REGULATION III/26 CONCERNING FAST RESCUE BOAT SYSTEMS ON RO-RO PASSENGER SHIPS

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its seventy-fourth session (30 May to 8 June 2001), noted that SOLAS regulation III/26, as amended by resolution MSC.47(66), which entered into force on 1 July 1998, requires all ro-ro passenger ships to be fitted with a fast rescue boat (FRB) and a means of rescue not later than the first periodical survey after 1 July 2000.

2 The Committee had been informed of many accidents and near-accidents as a result of trials and drills involving the launching and recovery of fast rescue boats that have been fitted to date onboard ro-ro passenger ships. Concerns have also been expressed that some masters of these ships and the crews involved in the launching and operation of fast rescue boats do not have confidence in this equipment, especially regarding its use in emergency conditions when the weather and sea state may be unfavourable.

3 The Committee, recognising the importance of this issue, instructed its Sub-Committees on Ship Design and Equipment (DE) and on Standards of Training and Watchkeeping (STW) to review the arrangement, specification, testing and operation of fast rescue boats and means of rescue, and the training of the relevant crew members, respectively, as a matter of urgency.

4 The Committee noted that an effective study of FRB installation and operation would of necessity take at least two years to complete, and that the final form of the revised requirements and recommendations could not be anticipated at that time. Therefore, MSC/Circ.1016 was issued to inform interested parties about the IMO review.

5 Since then, further research has been undertaken and operators of ships have been consulted. Where masters and crews have gained experience and confidence in the use of FRBs, the following salient points have been identified as contributing to successful operation:

- .1 all parts of the stowage, launch and recovery system are proven to be compatible well before installation, preferably at the design stage, and are supplied and supported by a single source;
- .2 the fast rescue boat is installed as near the mid-length of the ship as possible, the height of the lifting davit head is minimised, and there is a long towing painter from a boom that keeps the waterborne boat clear of the ship's wash; and
- .3 the fast rescue boat crew and the on-board launch personnel consistently train as an integrated team.

6 Member Governments and other parties involved in the design, installation, testing, approval, survey and operation of FRB systems are urged to take note of the information in paragraph 5 above and to pay particular attention to the location and integration of the system components when installing such systems. It needs to be emphasized that it is a condition of acceptance of such installations to demonstrate satisfactory performance in adverse weather conditions.

7 The Committee, at its seventy-seventh session (27 May to 6 June 2003), agreed that work on this issue should continue. Until the study is completed, however, and any revised measures are agreed by the Organization, it is recommended that due caution is exercised when installing, testing, launching and operating fast rescue boats, particularly where high launch heights are involved.

8 The Committee urges those parties with an interest in the design, installation, testing, approval, survey and operation of FRB systems to assist the Organization in the work it is undertaking on this issue. In particular, interested parties are urged to provide, to the DE and STW Sub-Committees, through the relevant Member Governments and/or international organizations, information, comments and proposals for improvement of FRB systems, including those that have already been installed, noting especially the factors identified in paragraph 5 above.

9 This circular complements MSC/Circ.1016.
