



Ref. T2-NAVSEC/2.11

MSC/Circ.1109
7 June 2004

FALSE SECURITY ALERTS AND DISTRESS/SECURITY DOUBLE ALERTS

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its seventy-eighth session (12 to 21 May 2004) exchanged views on a proposal relating to the actions which may be taken in relation to “false security alerts” and “distress/security double alerts”.

2 SOLAS regulation XI-2/6 requires ships to be fitted with a ship security alert system (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. The requirement for the carriage of SSAS, which is a covert system, is additional to the requirement to be provided with radio communication equipment capable of initiating and transmitting distress alerts and piracy attack alarms, both of which are overt systems.

3 Experience with false distress alerts gained since the introduction of GMDSS indicates that a ship may transmit a “false security alert” either as a result of technical failure of the SSAS or due to 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, shipboard personnel will be unaware, or unable to establish, whether a security alert is in fact being transmitted.

4 The Committee was therefore requested to advise what action should be taken between the time a security alert is first received ashore and the time that the competent authorities initiate action to address the security alert, bearing in mind that there is a need to determine whether the security alert received ashore is a genuine or a false one.

5 The Committee was also requested to consider what action should be taken in the event of a ship transmitting a distress alert and a security alert (distress/security double alert), either simultaneously or one after the other. In view of the fact that a security incident may lead to a distress situation or a distress situation may be followed by a security incident; and since all ships are capable of transmitting both alerts, simultaneously or in tandem; the competent authorities ashore need to assess the situation so as to determine and prioritise the response to be provided.

6 The Committee, bearing in mind the need to identify the nature and extent of the aspects involved, decided to consider these proposals further at its next session (1 to 10 December 2004) in the light of the actual experience to be gained from the use of ship security alerts systems.

7 The Committee invites Member Governments and international organizations to submit information and data in relation to actual cases they might experience during the period between 1 July 2004 and 15 October 2004. Such information and data do not necessarily need to identify the particular ships involved in the specific incidents to be reported.