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MSC/Circ.1109/Rev.1
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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” and issued MSC/Circ.1109 dated 7 June 2004 through which it invited 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 so as to enable the Committee to consider the issue further during its seventy-ninth session.

2 The Committee, at its seventy-ninth session (1 to 10 December 2004), when discussing the matter, noted that only limited information had been submitted in relation to actual cases experienced during the period between 1 July 2004 and 15 October 2004 and, bearing in mind the provisions of SOLAS regulation XI-2/6.1 in relation to the compliance of ships constructed before 1 July 2004 with the requirements to be provided with ship security alert system (SSAS), agreed that it was probable that only a small number of ships had been so far provided with SSAS. The Committee concluded that there was no need for action to be taken in relation to this issue on the understanding that it would reconsider the matter at a future session based on the information made available to the Organization in the interim. The Committee therefore agreed to leave the invitation to submit information and data relating to actual cases of “false security alerts” and “distress/security double alerts” open to future sessions.

3 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. 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. MSC/Circ.1110, which provides guidance on Matters related to SOLAS regulations XI-2/6 and XI-2/7, is also relevant.

4 Experience with false distress alerts gained since the introduction of GMDSS and a study of the information submitted in relation to “false security alerts” indicate 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 may be unaware, or unable to establish, whether a security alert is in fact being transmitted.

5 The Committee, at its seventy-eighth session, 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.

6 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 prioritize the response to be provided.

7 The Committee, bearing in mind the need to identify the nature and extent of the aspects involved, decided, at its seventy-ninth session, to consider these proposals further at a future session in the light of the actual experience gained in the interim from the use of SSAS.

8 Member Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations with consultative status are invited to submit to the Organization information and data in relation to actual cases they might henceforth experience. Such information and data do not necessarily need to identify the particular ships involved in the specific incidents to be reported.
