

U.S. Department
of Transportation

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

2100 Second Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20593-0001

COMDTINST 16122.2A
MAY 31 1996

COMMANDANT INSTRUCTION 16122.2A

Subj: MANAGEMENT AND OPERATION OF THE AUTOMATED MUTUAL ASSISTANCE
VESSEL RESCUE (AMVER) SYSTEM

Ref: (a) National Search and Rescue Manual, COMDTINST M16120.2 (Series)
(b) Coast Guard Addendum to the National Search and Rescue (SAR) Manual,
COMDTINST M16130 (Series)

1. PURPOSE. This Instruction updates the Commandant's policy for the operation and administration of the Automated Mutual-Assistance Vessel Rescue (AMVER) System. Intended users of this directive are all Coast Guard commands using and/or supporting the AMVER system.
2. Action. Area and district commanders, commanders of maintenance and logistics commands, commanding officers of headquarters units shall ensure compliance with the provisions of this instruction.
3. DIRECTIVES AFFECTED. Commandant Instruction M16122.2 is hereby cancelled.
4. MISSION. AMVER's primary mission is to maintain and provide information on commercial vessel locations for use in search and rescue operations. Predicted ships' locations and SAR capabilities shall be made available only to recognized SAR agencies and craft, in emergencies, without regard to nationality. Secondary missions include support of systems concerned with the safety of life and property at sea.

5. DISCUSSION and DEFINITIONS. AMVER supports SAR operations worldwide with a centralized database of merchant ship positions. Participation is voluntary unless mandated by a vessel's flag state, shipping company, or other authority. Participating vessels provide information on their SAR capabilities to the AMVER Maritime Relations office. The information is updated when changes occur. A message containing intended track is sent to the Operations Systems Center (OSC) Martinsburg, West Virginia, prior to the vessel's departure. It is updated at least every 48 hours, when voyage plans change, and upon arrival in port. The AMVER software maintains a dead reckoning (DR) track based on the predicted track. Coast Guard Command Centers, while functioning as Rescue Coordination Centers (RCCs), have direct access to the database. Other SAR agencies, U.S. and foreign, obtain this information by request through a Coast Guard RCC. AMVER information is released only to recognized SAR agencies for SAR or safety-of-life-at-sea purposes. The basic components of AMVER are identified in the following sections.
 - a. AMVER Center. The OSC serves as the AMVER Center, using computers to provide predicted ship positions and SAR characteristics of participating ships for use in a SAR situation. Data received from ships worldwide is entered into the AMVER database. The OSC staff develops new AMVER computer programs and updates existing ones to improve the system.
 - b. Communications Network.
 - (1) This component is comprised of a network of communications facilities of several nations. Voluntary reports from ships are collected and relayed by cooperating radio stations, or sent to earth stations via satellites, then to the AMVER Center for computer input. The communication network also permits rapid dissemination of predicted ship information for use during emergencies. Included are communication facilities which are not specifically designed for AMVER purposes, but which have been made available by controlling agencies and governments to assist AMVER on a collateral basis.
 - (2) Where needed, foreign nations are contacted concerning availability of their radio stations to participate in AMVER. Accordingly, opportunities for liaison with foreign nations which may lead to more effective worldwide communications coverage or

increased vessel participation for AMVER should be pursued by Commanders, Atlantic and Pacific Area.

- c. Education and Promotion Program. This component is administered by the Commandant (G-OPR-2) AMVER Maritime Relations (AMR) staff on detached duty in New York. The main focus of AMR is to keep ships in the AMVER Program. They also recruit new ships and administer a variety of support functions such as disseminating AMVER information to shipping interests and SAR agencies throughout the world. Increased vessel participation in AMVER and increased use of AMVER SURPICS by RCCs should result from an effective and enthusiastic AMVER education and promotion program. Aspects of the program are:
- (1) Liaison. Captains of the Port (COTPs), Officers in Charge Marine Inspection (OCMIs), area and district AMVER officers, and other Coast Guard officials who deal with vessel masters, shipping companies, coast radio stations, foreign SAR organizations, or governments with SAR or shipping jurisdictions, shall maintain active boarding and liaison efforts to encourage domestic and foreign support of AMVER. Full advantage should be taken of opportunities to encourage participation and support, emphasizing the cost effectiveness and humanitarian benefits of AMVER. Boardings of foreign vessels offer opportunities to provide information and answer questions from vessel masters and radio officers. Providing periodic reports to shipping company management about participation of their vessels is also helpful. All liaison efforts with foreign governments must be referred to Commandant (G-OPR-2), for coordination with Commandant (G-CI) and/or Department of State as necessary.
 - (2) National Weather Service (NWS) Port Boarding. Arrangements have been made for NWS port meteorological officers to visit masters and radio officers of commercial vessels to encourage active AMVER participation. This is in conjunction with NWS efforts to enlist participation in the Voluntary Observing Ship program.
 - (3) Public Information. This includes the publication of the "AMVER Bulletin", press releases, presentations before maritime gatherings, tours for AMR Center visitors, and other media efforts which may result in favorable publicity for

AMVER and increase participation. Publication and distribution of the AMVER Users Manual in appropriate foreign languages are part of this effort.

- (4) The AMVER Awards Program. This program is conducted in accordance with enclosure (1).
 - (5) The International Rescue-At-Sea Awards Program. This program is conducted in accordance with enclosure (2).
 - (6) Overseas Promotion. AMVER's recruitment of foreign flag vessels overseas require special procurement support. These special requirements are addressed in enclosure (3).
6. ORGANIZATION, AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY. The AMVER System shall be operated under the general policy guidance and operational control of the Commandant (G-OPR). Area and district commanders shall provide positive support to make full and proper use of AMVER outputs. Budgeting and funding to carry out AMVER functions will be provided by the command level responsible for the functions. All Coast Guard commands shall support and promote AMVER within the limits of their capabilities and scope of duties. Specific responsibilities of various offices, commands and units are summarized in paragraph 8.
7. RELEASE OF AMVER INFORMATION. AMVER participants are assured that the voyage information they provide is proprietary and will be used only for maritime safety purposes. Without this assurance, many masters and owners would not participate in the voluntary AMVER system. Vessel movement information provided to AMVER is considered proprietary commercial or financial information and must be handled as privileged or commercial confidential. The Coast Guard shall take care that vessel movement information in the AMVER system is not used to the disadvantage of the vessels involved. AMVER information derived from vessel movement reports and the daily vessel arrival data shall be released only as prescribed in subparagraph a. below. If a request for such information is made which is not authorized under subparagraph a., it should be handled in accordance with the Privacy (Coast Guard) and Freedom of Information Acts Manual, COMDTINST. M05260.2. Such requests should be referred to Commandant (G-OPR). The AMVER System does not maintain a historical archive. SURPICS generated in support of a SAR case may become part of the case file for that particular case, and as such would be available to appropriate investigative authorities.
- a. Specific Guidance.
 - (1) SURPICS, any plot data, and vessel characteristics shall be released only as follows:
 - (a) To recognized SAR authorities for use in the

- pursuit of the safety of lives and property at sea;
- (b) To ships or aircraft in an emergency situation which need this information to deal with the emergency; and
 - (c) To flight operations centers for precautionary purposes, with the approval of the Commandant (G-OPR). An example would be a long overwater flight by a Head of State or other VIP. Such use should be kept to a minimum.
- (2) Vessel Arrival (VARVAL) Data. This list of vessels is available to each MSO, COTP and OCMI. It contains a three-day forecast of vessel arrivals at U.S. ports based upon both reported and computed ETAs and serves multiple purposes. It provides COTPs, MSOs, and other boarding agencies with planning information to conduct the AMVER Educational Program. This list also provides, as indicated in the AMVER Users Manual, a vessel's notice of arrival at a U. S. port required by 33 CFR 160.207 and 160.209. In no case should a VARVAL report be distributed outside the Coast Guard without prior approval of Commandant (G-OPR), since this report forecasts beyond the 24-hour notice. Release of information contained in this report falls into two categories:
- (a) Arrival information received more than 24 hours prior to vessel ETA. This information is for internal planning only, and must be treated as proprietary or commercial confidential.
 - (b) Arrival information received 24 hours or less in advance of vessel ETA. This information becomes part of public record like arrival information provided by non-participating vessels, to meet statutory requirements, and may be made public like other public records.
- (3) Requests from customs agents for vessel position or movement information other than 24-hour notice of

arrival will be referred to the vessel's agent.

- (4) AMVER information can be made available on a limited basis only to organizations with recognized SAR responsibility. The information is for SAR purposes only and is not intended for use as a general purpose list of ships and their characteristics.
- (5) Requests for information from AMVER received from commercial medical services will be treated as requests for assistance. When contacted by a commercial medical service, RCC personnel shall determine whether or not the assistance of an AMVER participant is needed. If assistance is needed, the RCC shall notify the appropriate AMVER vessel and request help. The commercial medical service and the vessel needing aid will be advised by RCC personnel of the action taken. RCC personnel will not tell the commercial medical service the name or call sign of the AMVER participant except when necessary to contribute to successful case completion, e.g., it may be necessary for the commercial medical service to pass medical details directly to the assisting vessel.

b. G4ENERAL GUIDANCE

- (1) Persons likely to receive requests for AMVER information, such as AMVER Officers and RCC controllers, should be familiar with the Privacy (Coast Guard) and Freedom of Information Acts Manual, COMDTINST. M5260.2 (Series). Not every request for AMVER information must be handled as a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Material that is ordinarily made available to the public as part of the AMVER educational program is available upon oral or written request.
- (2) The Coast Guard is not required to compile or develop a record for answering a public request for information. A request for AMVER statistical records not normally produced, but available thru special efforts, should be referred to Commandant (G-OPR).
- (3) Whenever doubt exists about whether to release AMVER records, or requests are made for records not covered adequately by this Instruction, the request shall be referred to Commandant (G-OPR) for decision.

8. AMVER RESPONSIBILITIES

- a. The Commandant's responsibilities for AMVER are summarized below.
 - (1) G-OPR will provide program policy, direction and oversight, and publish implementing instructions.
 - (2) G-OPR will furnish coordination at Headquarters level; coordination between the area and district commanders; and coordination relating to policy matters with other federal agencies, foreign governments and international organizations.
 - (3) G-OPR's AMVER Maritime Relations Office in New York City will:
 - (a) Coordinate recruitment, processing and retention of program participants;
 - (b) Publish and distribute the AMVER BULLETIN;
 - (c) Produce, stock and distribute AMVER forms, users manuals, and SAR questionnaires, including those in foreign languages;
 - (d) Provide guidance, training and materials to area/district AMVER officers, AMVER boarding officers, and NOAA's Port Metrological officers;
 - (e) Provide background information to speakers giving talks on AMVER;
 - (f) Carry out the AMVER and IRAS Awards programs;
 - (g) Represent AMVER at national and overseas maritime trade shows;
 - (h) Provide AMVER orientations to U.S. and foreign government officials, and corporate officials;
 - (i) Coordinate local, national, and international press and media coverage of AMVER.
 - (4) G-SCC will operate and control the AMVER Center as part of the Operations Systems Center. The AMVER Center shall conduct a developmental program for improving AMVER services; conduct any studies required for the AMVER program based on the AMVER

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data base; maintain statistics pertinent to participation in or use of the AMVER System; and provide districts with daily vessel arrival data.

b. Area and District Commanders.

- (1) Area and district commanders shall be responsible for planning, programming, evaluating and managing the operation and use of the AMVER System within their respective areas and for issuing implementing instructions. They shall also provide technical support and representation as necessary to assist G-OPR in carrying out AMVER responsibilities. Presentation of AMVER awards to shipping companies is an example of support flag and other senior officers can provide.
- (2) District commanders shall conduct a positive AMVER educational program and provide communications support for AMVER under guidance of their respective area commander. Area and district commanders shall recognize, by letter to shipping companies, the contributions of ships responding to requests for assistance generated via AMVER, and particularly in situations of electronic "false alarms". District AMVER officers shall be designated to ensure this work is carried out. They should be chosen from the staff where these responsibilities can be most effectively carried out.
- (3) District AMVER officers shall administer the AMVER System within the district, and shall coordinate selected boardings for the education program, in accordance with "Standard Operating Procedures for District AMVER Officers" provided by the AMVER Maritime Relations Office. AMVER officers shall conduct this work in cooperation with the National Weather Service Port Meteorological officer in their area, and with the management of the shipping industry whenever possible. Close ties must be maintained with the district public information officer and the RCC to obtain publicity - especially that relating to successful SAR cases involving AMVER - and ensuring the publicity is released to the media. Items of interest should also be forwarded to AMR for the AMVER Bulletin.
- (4) District public affairs offices shall notify the AMR in New York immediately upon becoming aware of an

AMVER-assisted SAR case developing, in progress, or completed. AMR will assist public affairs offices in arranging local coverage incorporating AMVER's role; assist in arranging national press and media coverage; and in major cases, augment district staffs with AMR public affairs specialists to coordinate coverage on-site. District public affairs offices should assist in providing local press contacts, spokespersons, facilities, photo coverage and logistical support. AMR can be contacted by:

Telephone: (212) 668-7762/64
Telefax: (212) 668-7684
Message Address: COGARD AMR NEW YORK, NY"
24-Hour Page: Dial 1-800-SKY-PAGE, Enter PIN 2291358, Press #, Enter Telephone Number of District Point of Contact, Press#

- (5) The Chief, Marine Safety Division (or equivalent) shall provide the district AMVER officer with assistance in establishing and cultivating liaison with the top management of the shipping industry to increase AMVER participation. Business and social gatherings of the marine industry are excellent vehicles for this facet of the AMVER educational program, and fine occasions to offer the services of an AMVER speaker.
- (6) RCC controllers shall be well versed in all aspects of the AMVER System, particularly in the use of Surface Pictures (SURPICS). SURPICS should be used whenever it appears they may assist in the resolution of an emergency. SURPICS shall not be requested or used for law enforcement situations. Controllers must ensure that the policy prescribed in paragraph 7 on release of AMVER information is followed. Information on cases involving AMVER which might be suitable for an AMVER Bulletin article should be coordinated with the district AMVER officer and forwarded in a timely manner to the AMVER Bulletin Editor. All Coast Guard Command Centers should include AMR (COGARD AMR NEW YORK NY) as an info addressee on situation reports and message traffic involving AMVER-assisted cases. This will enable AMR to coordinate appropriate press and media coverage, and record the case for consideration for the International Rescue-at-Sea Award. The contribution of time and action by voluntary participating vessels is the essence of the AMVER System. Often, the success of RCC efforts depends on AMVER vessels

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assisting in blue water SAR. These vessels are on tight logistic schedules and diversion for SAR is costly to these vessels and companies. Diversion shall be minimized consistent with lifesaving needs.

/s/ RUDY K. PECHEL
Chief, Office of Navigation
Safety & Waterway Services

Encl: (1) AMVER Awards Program
(2) IRAS Award
(3) Procurement Speciality Items

THE AMVER AWARDS PROGRAM

The AMVER Awards Program was inaugurated in 1971 to recognize those vessels which regularly participate in the AMVER system. Extremely favorable response from the merchant shipping industry around the world to the idea of annual AMVER awards has justified the continuance of the program.

AMVER award materials provide worldwide exposure and favorable publicity for the program. Ships flying the various colored AMVER pennants are a constant reminder of that ship and company's commitment to safety at sea. Prominent display of AMVER Certificates of Merit in company boardrooms, corporate office reception areas and on the bulkhead of wardrooms or bridges aboard ship attest to the prestige accorded these awards.

The AMVER Awards program serves the dual purpose of retaining ships already participating in the program, by way of a tangible expression of appreciation; and assisting in the recruitment of new ships.

The presentation of AMVER awards serves as an instrument of our nation's foreign policy. United States embassies and consulates around the world use the occasion to arrange a ceremony or reception to express the appreciation of the United States Government to government and industry officials of a host nation for the voluntary participation of its ships in this humanitarian program.

Similarly, U.S. Coast Guard District Offices can use the occasion of an AMVER awards presentation, either at the district headquarters, or in conjunction with a local maritime exhibition or professional event to thank local shipowners for the support provided by their shipping companies.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- a. Those vessels with at least 128 days on the AMVER plot in a calendar year are eligible for an award.
- b. Vessels that have continuous participation in AMVER before and after a shipyard and/or lay up period (not exceeding two years) may receive credit for these periods for the purpose of satisfying requirements for consecutive multiple year awards, if the owner or master submits a request to the AMVER Maritime Relations Office in New York within sixty days of the inactive period.

Enclosure (1) to COMDTINST 16122.2A

AWARD MATERIALS

- a. Each company with a ship eligible for an award will receive a Letter of Appreciation signed by the Commandant of the United States Coast Guard, placed in an attractive folder with the AMVER logo on the front.
- b. A Certificate of Merit will be produced for each individual ship of that company, embellished with the year of the award, the ship's name and call sign, the number of total awards, and the number of consecutive awards for that particular ship.
- c. The appropriate color pennant will be forwarded to the ship on the following anniversary years: BLUE pennant for a vessel completing its first year of participation and being honored for the first time. GOLD pennant for a vessel completing five consecutive years of eligibility for an AMVER award. PURPLE pennant for a vessel completing ten consecutive years of eligibility for an AMVER award.

SPECIAL AWARDS

- a. Ships completing FIFTEEN YEARS, TWENTY YEARS, and TWENTY-FIVE years of consecutive AMVER award eligibility will receive special awards recognizing their accomplishment.
- b. Ships winning the International Rescue At Sea Award for the most significant AMVER rescue in a calendar year will receive a distinctive plaque from Lloyds of London Press, and be eligible to fly the unique RED pennant of the AMVER program.

THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE AT SEA AWARD

The International Rescue At Sea (IRAS) Award, inaugurated in 1992, is underwritten by Lloyds of London Press. It was established to recognize the AMVER-participating ship(s) which accomplishes the most significant rescue during a specific year. Award consideration will be extended only to ships participating in the U.S. Coast Guard's Automated Mutual-assistance Vessel Rescue (AMVER) System. All ships of all flags are eligible to participate in AMVER voluntarily, at no cost.

The award period will be the Calendar Year beginning on 1 January and ending on 31 December.

A panel, to consist of one representative from Lloyds of London Press, one representative from the AMVER Program, and one representative from the Search and Rescue program at U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters will meet as soon as practicable after the close of an award period to select the award-winning ship. Criteria for selection shall include, but not be limited to:

- a. Number of persons saved;
- b. Value of property saved;
- c. Difficulty of the rescue (i.e., weather conditions, sea state, danger due to fire, explosion, listing, criminal activity, military hostilities, etc.);
- d. Textbook and/or innovative seamanship principles, methods or procedures employed;
- e. Heroic actions on the part individual crew members or ship's company;
- f. Extraordinary distance of diversion, or time consumed in search and/or rescue efforts;
- g. Exercise of command, control and/or coordination at the scene of a distress prior to relief by appropriate SAR authority;
- h. Extraordinary medical assistance and/or relief provided to persons in distress/survivors;

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- i. Extensive search and/or location of a distress under severe weather (hurricane, typhoon, wind, snow, fog) or sea state conditions; and
- j. Accomplishment of AMVER-requested search, rescue, and assistance by a vessel which exceeds its expected capabilities under given circumstances.

Winners of the International Rescue At Sea Award shall be authorized to fly a distinctive RED AMVER pennant, for as long as the vessel is in commission, in recognition of their achievement. The International Rescue At Sea Award shall take the form of a plaque, suitably engraved with the award title, award-winning ship and company, year of award and identification of the circumstances of the award.

Presentation of the International Rescue At Sea Award shall take place at an appropriate social function within the maritime community, commensurate with the prestige of this award. A senior official of Lloyds of London Press shall make the presentation to the ship's master, if available.

Nominations for the IRAS Award shall be compiled and forwarded to the AMVER Program Manager, Commandant (G-OPR-2) during January of each year by area/district AMVER Officers or Operations staff. Appropriate situation reports or narrative summary should accompany nominations to provide the basis for evaluation, competition and selection.

PROCUREMENT SUPPORT TO AMVER RECRUITING

AMVER is a Coast Guard sponsored worldwide ship reporting system. Recruiting and keeping resources, such as ships and marine radio stations, in the AMVER program is a priority mission of the Coast Guard's Search and Rescue Program.

Due to the nature of its mission, AMVER is frequently involved in extraordinary ventures which do not lend themselves well to typical Coast Guard fiscal transactions. These transactions must often respond to key recruitment opportunities that arise on relatively short notice, or for which all the costs are not precisely known in advance. Many of these procurements are available only on a sole source basis. Examples include:

- a. Special ceremonial and promotional items;
- b. Advertising in national and international print media;
- c. Costs associated with participation in domestic and overseas marine expositions;
- d. Services for ceremonial events where costs depend upon actual attendance; and
- e. Unexpected expenses during out-of-town and overseas trips.

Authorization to procure speciality items or services is restricted to the requirement to recruit and retain resources (merchant vessels, radio stations, etc.) in the AMVER Program. All Request for Purchases must be stamped with the following statement: "ITEMS ARE FOR USE TO PROMOTE RECRUITMENT OF RESOURCES FOR THE AMVER PROGRAM".