

Ref. T2/5.01

**GUIDANCE TO ADMINISTRATIONS ON IMPROVING THE CAPABILITY OF  
SHORE AUTHORITIES TO CONTACT SHIPS DURING SITUATIONS  
INVOLVING DISTRESS OR SAR OPERATIONS**

1 At its sixty-sixth session (28 May to 6 June 1996), the Maritime Safety Committee, recalling SOLAS regulation V/10 - Distress messages obligations and proceedings and the relevant other international conventions which obligate masters of ships to assist others in distress at sea, noted that situations have occurred during implementation of the GMDSS where search and rescue (SAR) authorities have been unable to contact ships known to be fitted with GMDSS equipment to verify a distress situation or seek their assistance.

2 The Committee, recognizing the great importance of reliable shore-to-ship communications under the GMDSS in enabling assistance to be rendered to those in distress, and desiring to identify and resolve problems which may contribute to shore-to-ship communication difficulties, invited Administrations to:

- .1 contact owners or operators of ships entitled to fly their flag or the administration of the registry of other ships which fail to respond to calls from search and rescue authorities ashore, to determine the reason for their not responding;
- .2 arrange for a GMDSS compliance inspection or take other appropriate corrective action regarding a ship under their jurisdiction which fails to respond to calls from search and rescue authorities;
- .3 develop an effective national information and follow-up programme to ensure that responsible authorities, manufacturers, training institutes, shipping officials and GMDSS service providers know, understand and properly implement the requirements of SOLAS regulation V/10 and the recommendations of the Organization regarding distress and safety communications and assisting persons in distress;
- .4 provide guidance to ships on the importance of equipment registration, of proper watchstanding, of avoiding false distress alerts, and of following up to cancel any inadvertent distress alerts;
- .5 review broadcast practices to minimize excessive use of messages which cause alarms on ship bridges, of message categories which cannot be suppressed by the ship, of unnecessary duplication of information to the same ocean areas, or of transmission to an unnecessarily large area or number of ships; and
- .6 ensure that search and rescue authorities have ready access to suitable GMDSS databases to support SAR, and access, as appropriate, to use DSC coast stations domestically or through co-operative arrangements with neighbouring States or assisting ships.

3 Member Governments are invited to bring this guidance to the attention of all concerned for information and action, as appropriate.