

U.S. Department
of Transportation

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

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RADAR REFLECTORS FOR LIFEBOATS AND LIFERAFTS UNDER SOLAS 74/83

On July 1, 1986, the 1983 amendments to the 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) will come into force. The 1983 amendments include a completely revised Chapter III on Lifesaving Appliances and Arrangements. One of the new requirements is that lifeboats and liferafts must carry "an efficient radar reflector."

The 1983 SOLAS amendments directly affect large commercial ships in international service, registered in the United States, whose keels are laid on or after July 1, 1986. Ships with keel laying dates before July 1, 1986 will generally be allowed to continue to use their existing equipment until its replacement from wear and tear becomes necessary. But, any lifesaving equipment replaced on ships engaged in international service on or after July 1, 1986 should meet the 1983 SOLAS amendments. Eventually, we expect to revise our regulations so that lifeboat and liferaft equipment is the same for all ships, regardless of when they were built.

For now, we do not anticipate formal Coast Guard approval for radar reflectors. In order for a radar reflector to be used on a lifeboat or liferaft, it would have to be certified by its manufacturer to be suitable for use at a range of at least 4 nautical miles in calm weather conditions. Of course, we would expect the manufacturer to support this certification with suitable trials. The radar reflector would also have to be arranged so that it could be appropriately mounted on a lifeboat or liferaft. Manufacturers of radar reflectors meeting these requirements should notify us of the make and model designation of the radar reflector, and provide supporting information. We will maintain and distribute a list of acceptable radar reflectors. Manufacturers will also be permitted to mark these radar reflectors "Meets U.S. Coast Guard requirements for lifeboat and liferaft radar reflectors under SOLAS 74/83." Any radar reflector sold with this marking should be accompanied by appropriate information on the proper assembly, mounting, and use of the radar reflector, as well as any appropriate maintenance instructions.

If you are a manufacturer or distributor of radar reflectors that could meet these requirements, please consider listing your product with us. If you have questions concerning this matter, feel free to contact Mr. Kurt Heinz of my staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. L. Markle". The signature is written in a cursive style with large, bold letters.

R. L. MARKLE
Chief, Survival Systems Branch
Merchant Vessel Inspection and
Documentation Division
By direction of the Commandant