

**ANNEX 21**

**RESOLUTION MSC.514(105)  
(adopted on 28 April 2022)**

**GUIDELINES FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF FALSE DISTRESS ALERTS**

THE MARITIME SAFETY COMMITTEE,

RECALLING Article 28(b) of the Convention on the International Maritime Organization concerning the functions of the Committee,

RECALLING ALSO resolution A.814(19), by which the Assembly, at its nineteenth session, adopted *Guidelines for the avoidance of false distress alerts*,

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974 ("the Convention") adopted by resolution MSC.496(105),

RECOGNIZING the need to revise and update the *Guidelines for the avoidance of false distress alerts* in order to ensure the proper operation of radiocommunication services which are part of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS),

HAVING CONSIDERED, at its 105th session, the recommendation made by the Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue at its eighth session,

- 1 ADOPTS the revised *Guidelines for the avoidance of false distress alerts*, set out in the annex to the present resolution;
- 2 URGES Governments to bring these Guidelines to the attention of all concerned;
- 3 DETERMINES that this resolution supersedes resolution A.814(19), as from 1 January 2024;
- 4 INVITES the Assembly to endorse the action taken by the Maritime Safety Committee.

## ANNEX

### **GUIDELINES FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF FALSE DISTRESS ALERTS**

- 1 Administrations should:
  - .1 inform shipowners and seafarers about the implications of the rising number of false distress alerts;
  - .2 take steps to enable ships properly to register all GMDSS equipment, and ensure that this registration data is readily available to rescue coordination centres (RCCs);
  - .3 consider establishing and using national enforcement measures to prosecute those who:
    - .1 inadvertently transmit a false distress alert without proper cancellation, or who fail to respond to a distress alert due to misuse or negligence;
    - .2 repeatedly transmit false distress alerts; and
    - .3 deliberately transmit false distress alerts;
  - .4 use the International Telecommunication Union violation reporting process for false distress alerts, or for failure to respond to a distress alert relayed from shore to ship;
  - .5 ensure that all relevant ship personnel know how GMDSS equipment operates, the importance of avoiding false distress alerts, the steps to be taken to prevent the transmission of such false distress alerts, and the procedures to be followed when a false distress alert has been transmitted;
  - .6 inform type approval authorities of false distress alert problems, in order to draw their attention to the testing and alerting functions of radio equipment during the type approval process;
  - .7 urge companies installing radio equipment to ensure that relevant ship personnel are made familiar with the operation of the installed equipment;
  - .8 investigate the cause when a specific model of GMDSS equipment repeatedly transmits unwanted distress alerts, and inform the appropriate organizations accordingly;
  - .9 ensure that surveyors and inspectors are informed about GMDSS equipment, and particularly about how to operate and test it without transmitting a false distress alert; and
  - .10 require that GMDSS radio operators be appropriately certificated.
- 2 Manufacturers, suppliers and installers should:
  - .1 design equipment for distress alerting so that:

- .1 it will not be possible to transmit a distress alert unintentionally;
  - .2 the panel for emergency operation is separated from the one for normal operation and is partially fitted with a cover, and the switches on the panel are clearly classified by colouring; and
  - .3 there are standardized arrangements of operation panels and operational procedures;
- .2 design test features so that the testing of GMDSS equipment will not result in the transmission of false distress alerts;
- .3 ensure that any distress alert activation is indicated visually or acoustically, or both, and shows that the equipment is transmitting a distress alert until manually deactivated;
- .4 ensure also that the EPIRB position on board, installations (including the release and activation mechanisms) and handling procedures preclude unwanted activation (designing the EPIRB so that when it is out of its bracket it must also be immersed in water to activate automatically, and so that, when operated manually, a two-step activation action is required);
- .5 provide clear and precise operational instructions that are easy to understand (maintenance and operational instructions should be separated, and should be written both in English and in any other language deemed necessary);
- .6 ensure that, when any GMDSS equipment has been installed, the necessary instructions are given to ship personnel, drawing specific attention to operational procedures (a record should be kept that such instructions have been given); and
- .7 ensure also that supply and installation personnel understand how the GMDSS works and the consequences of transmitting a false distress alert.
- 3 Trainers and educators should:
- .1 ensure that maritime education centres are informed about false distress alert problems and their implications for SAR, the GMDSS, etc., and procedures to be followed if a false distress alert is transmitted, and include them in their teaching programmes;
  - .2 obtain and use actual case histories as examples;
  - .3 emphasize the need to avoid false distress alerts; and
  - .4 ensure that no inadvertent transmission of a false distress alert occurs when training on GMDSS equipment.
- 4 Companies, masters and seafarers should, as appropriate, ensure that:
- .1 all GMDSS-certificated personnel responsible for sending a distress alert have been instructed about, and are competent to operate, the particular radio equipment on the ship;

- .2 the person or persons responsible for communications during distress incidents give the necessary instructions and information to all crew members on how to use GMDSS equipment to send a distress alert;
- .3 as part of each "abandon ship" drill, instruction is given on how emergency equipment should be used to provide GMDSS functions;
- .4 GMDSS equipment testing is only undertaken under the supervision of the person responsible for communications during distress incidents;
- .5 GMDSS equipment testing or drills are never allowed to cause false distress alerts;
- .6 encoded identities of EPIRBs, which are used by SAR personnel responding to emergencies, are properly registered in a database accessible 24 hours a day or automatically provided to SAR authorities (masters should confirm that their EPIRBs have been registered with such a database, to help SAR services identify the ship in the event of distress and rapidly obtain other information which will enable them to respond appropriately);
- .7 EPIRB, DSC and ship earth station registration data is immediately updated if there is any change in information relating to the ship such as owner, name or flag, and that the necessary action is taken to re-programme the ship's new data in the GMDSS equipment concerned;
- .8 for new ships, positions for installing EPIRBs are considered at the earliest stage of ship design and construction;
- .9 EPIRBs are carefully installed in accordance with manufacturers' instructions and using qualified personnel (sometimes EPIRBs are damaged or broken due to improper handling or installation. They must be installed in a location that will enable them to float free and automatically activate if the ship sinks. Care must be taken to ensure that they are not tampered with or accidentally activated. If the coding has to be changed or the batteries serviced, manufacturers' requirements must be strictly followed. There have been cases where EPIRB lanyards were attached to the ship so that the EPIRB could not float free; lanyards are only to be used by survivors for securing the EPIRB to a survival craft or person in water);
- .10 EPIRBs are not activated if assistance is already immediately available (EPIRBs are intended to call for assistance if the ship is unable to obtain help by other means, and to provide position information and homing signals for SAR units);
- .11 if a distress alert has been accidentally transmitted, the ship makes every reasonable attempt to communicate with the RCC by any means to cancel the false distress alert using the procedures given in ITU World Radiocommunication Conference Resolution 349, as contained in the latest edition of the ITU-R Maritime Manual on *Operational procedures for cancelling false distress alerts in the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System*;
- .12 if possible, after emergency use, the EPIRB is retrieved and deactivated; and

- .13      when an EPIRB is damaged and needs to be disposed of, if a ship is sold for scrap, or if for any other reason an EPIRB will no longer be used, the EPIRB is made inoperable, either by removing its battery and, if possible, returning it to the manufacturer, or by demolishing it.

**Note:** If the EPIRB is returned to the manufacturer, it should be wrapped in tin foil to prevent transmission of signals during shipment.

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