



PUBLIC NOTICE

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WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS BUREAU HIGHLIGHTS RECENT AMENDMENTS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION FOR THE SAFETY OF LIFE AT SEA, 1974, AFFECTING COMPULSORY VESSELS AND VESSEL INSPECTORS

By this Public Notice, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau (Bureau) notifies all FCC-licensed vessel inspectors (inspectors) and U.S. compulsory vessels making international voyages (SOLAS vessels) of the International Maritime Organization's (IMO's) recent updates to performance standards and amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974, pertaining to (1) the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) radiocommunications equipment under SOLAS and (2) the FCC's ship safety certificates for SOLAS compliance. These changes were adopted by the IMO in April 2022 by way of Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) Resolution 496(105)¹ and other MSC resolutions related to performance standards.²

GMDSS RADIOCOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT. Operators of SOLAS vessels should be aware that, in June 2019 and April 2022, the IMO updated the performance standards for the following GMDSS radiocommunications equipment: emergency position-indicating radio beacons (EPIRBs), maritime safety information and search and rescue related information transmitted by medium frequency (MF) (NAVTEX) and high frequency (HF) radios, search and rescue radar transponders (SART), shipborne very high frequency (VHF) radio installations capable of voice communication and digital selective calling, shipborne MF and MF/HF radio installations, Inmarsat-C ship earth stations, survival craft portable two-way VHF radiotelephone apparatus, aeronautical portable two-way VHF radiotelephone apparatus, and shipborne integrated communication systems.³

For the EPIRBs, the IMO recommended, in pertinent part, that governments ensure that certain EPIRBs "installed on or after 1 July 2022, conform to performance standards . . . not inferior to those specified in [MSC Resolution 471(101)]."⁴ For the remaining GMDSS equipment, the IMO recommended that governments "ensure that shipborne equipment installed on or after 1 January 2024, which will form part of the [GMDSS], conform to performance standards not inferior to those adopted in

¹ The MSC of the IMO, *Amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life At Sea, 1974 (MSC Resolution 496(105))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.496\(105\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.496(105).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024).

² MSC resolutions 471(101), 508(105), 510(105), 511(105), 512(105), 513(105), 515(105), 516(105), 517(105).

³ *Id.* See also *infra* notes 4, 9-17, and accompanying chart.

⁴ MSC, *Performance Standards for Float-Free Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs) Operating on 406 MHz (Resolution MSC.471(101))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.471\(101\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.471(101).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024).

[April 2022].”⁵

However, recognizing that the updated standards for new shipborne VHF radio installations, shipborne MF and MF/HF radio installations, or Inmarsat-C ship earth stations would require additional time to implement and taking into account equipment availability, the IMO issued MSC.1/Circ.1676 in June 2023. The MSC concluded that “it was unrealistic” to expect equipment conforming to these new standards “to be available for installation from 1 January 2024.”⁶ Therefore, it “invited Member States to consider permitting until January 1, 2028 the continued installation” of the aforementioned equipment “conforming to performance standards not inferior to those specified in” previously-released performance standards resolutions.⁷

In the past, the Commission has updated its rules to implement international obligations and recommendations. The Commission has not at this time updated its rules to implement MSC Resolution 496(105); if it does so, the Commission will designate any new requirements and the associated deadlines for compliance at that time. While the performance standards adopted in April 2022 are not currently required by the Commission’s rules, SOLAS vessel owners should nevertheless consider the possibility of future Commission updates when purchasing new or upgraded equipment.⁸

For ease of reference, the chart below lists the equipment, standards affected, and applicable installation dates recommended by the IMO.

Equipment	IMO Performance Standard	Installed On or After Dates
Float-Free 406 MHz EPIRBs	MSC.471(101) ⁹	1 July 2022
Shipborne Integrated Communication System	MSC.517(105) ¹⁰	1 January 2024

⁵ MSC, *Delays Affecting the Availability of New GMDSS Equipment Compliant with the Revised Performance Standards Set Out in Resolutions MSC.511(105), MSC.512(105) and MSC.513(105) (MSC. 1/Circ. 1676)*, <https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/OurWork/Safety/Documents/Documents%20relevant%20to%20GMDSS/MS.1-Circ.1676.pdf> (last visited June 27, 2024) (*MSC Delay Circular*).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.* For the previously-released performance standards for each type of equipment, *see infra* notes 13-15.

⁸ To assist in interpreting the new GMDSS requirements, in July 2023, the IMO updated the Sub-Committee on Radiocommunications and Search and Rescue (COMSAR) guidelines entitled, “*Harmonization of GMDSS Requirements for Radio Installations on Board SOLAS Ships*.” IMO, *Harmonization of GMDSS Requirements for Radio Installations on Board SOLAS Ships* (July 3, 2023), <https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/OurWork/Safety/Documents/IMO%20Documents%20related%20to/COMSAR.1-Circ.32-Rev.2.pdf>. Given Resolution MSC.496(105) and the modernization of GMDSS, COMSAR approved the updated guidelines to provide “an unambiguous interpretation of the radio installation requirements of SOLAS . . . and related IMO resolutions.” *Id.* The guidelines state that they are applicable when installing GMDSS radio equipment on SOLAS vessels and are intended for use by governments, ship owners, and electronics companies. *Id.*

⁹ *See supra* note 4. In June 2021, the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) published IEC 61097-2:2021, which is the certification test standard for this IMO performance standard. IEC, *Global maritime distress and safety system (GMDSS) – Part 2: Cospas-Sarsat EPIRB – Emergency position indicating radio beacon operating on 406 MHz – Operational and performance requirements, methods of testing and required test results*, <https://webstore.iec.ch/publication/64658> (last visited June 27, 2024).

¹⁰ MSC, *Performance Standards for Shipborne Integrated Communication System (ICS) When Used in the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS)(Resolution MSC.517(105))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.517\(105\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.517(105).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024).

Equipment	IMO Performance Standard	Installed On or After Dates
Aeronautical Portable Two-Way VHF Radiotelephone Apparatus	MSC.516(105) ¹¹	1 January 2024
Survival Craft Portable Two-Way VHF Radiotelephone Apparatus	MSC.515(105) ¹²	1 January 2024
Inmarsat-C Ship Earth Stations	MSC.513(105) ¹³	1 January 2028
Shipborne MF and MF/HF Radio Installations	MSC.512(105) ¹⁴	1 January 2028
Shipborne VHF Radio Installation	MSC.511(105) ¹⁵	1 January 2028
Radar SART	MSC.510(105) ¹⁶	1 January 2024

¹¹ MSC, *Amendments to the Performance Standards for Radiocommunication Equipment (Resolution MSC.516(105))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.516\(105\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.516(105).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024).

¹² MSC, *Performance Standards for Survival Craft Portable Two-Way VHF Radiotelephone Apparatus (Resolution MSC.515(105))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.515\(105\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.515(105).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024). In November 2023, the IEC published IEC 61097-12:1996+AMD1:2017+AMD2:2023, which is the certification test standard for this IMO performance standard. IEC, *Global maritime distress and safety system (GMDSS) – Part 12: Survival craft portable two-way VHF radiotelephone apparatus – Operational and performance requirements, methods of testing and required test results*, <https://webstore.iec.ch/publication/90025> (last visited June 27, 2024).

¹³ MSC, *Performance Standards for INMARSAT-C Ship Earth Stations Capable of Transmitting and Receiving Direct-Printing Communications (Resolution MSC.513(105))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.513\(105\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.513(105).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024). The MSC recommended that the INMARSAT-C Ship Earth Stations conform to performance standards that are not inferior to those specified in the annex to resolution A.807(19), as amended. *MSC Delay Circular, supra* note 5. In February 2024, the IEC published IEC 61097-4:2024, which is the certification test standard for this IMO performance standard. IEC, *Global maritime distress and safety system (GMDSS) – Part 4: Inmarsat-C ship earth station and Inmarsat enhanced group call (EGC) equipment – Operational and performance requirements, methods of testing and required test results*, <https://webstore.iec.ch/publication/84363> (last visited June 27, 2024).

¹⁴ MSC, *Performance Standards for Shipborne MF and MF/HF Radio Installations Capable of Voice Communication, Digital Selective Calling and Reception of Maritime Safety Information and Search And Rescue Related Information (Resolution MSC.512(105))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.512\(105\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.512(105).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024). The MSC recommended that the installations conform to performance standards that are not inferior to those specified in the annex to resolution A.804(19), as amended, and A806(19), as amended. *MSC Delay Circular, supra* note 5.

¹⁵ MSC, *Performance Standards for Shipborne VHF Radio Installations Capable of Voice Communication and Digital Selective Calling, (Resolution MSC.511(105))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.511\(105\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.511(105).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024). The MSC recommended that the installations conform to performance standards that are not inferior to those specified in the annex to resolution A.803(19), as amended. *MSC Delay Circular, supra* note 5.

¹⁶ MSC, *Performance Standards for Search and Rescue Radar Transponders (Resolution MSC.510(105))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.510\(105\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.510(105).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024).

Equipment	IMO Performance Standard	Installed On or After Dates
MF (NAVTEX) and HF	MSC.508(105) ¹⁷	1 January 2024

SHIP SAFETY CERTIFICATES. MSC Resolution 496(105) modernized the SOLAS provisions regarding radiocommunications and updated various ship safety certificates,¹⁸ and therefore requires updates to FCC Form 806,¹⁹ which is entitled “Certificate of Compliance with the Radio Provisions of the International Convention of the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974 (as Amended),” and FCC Form 829,²⁰ which is entitled “Cargo Ship Safety Radio Certificate.” Both FCC Forms are used by FCC licensed inspectors when inspecting a vessel’s radio equipment and certifying that a vessel complies with the SOLAS radio requirements. Notably, FCC Forms 806 and 829 were intended to mirror the applicable SOLAS ship safety certificates.²¹

The Bureau is currently in the process of incorporating the SOLAS changes into FCC Forms 806 and 829, including obtaining OMB approval of the revisions through the Paperwork Reduction Act.²² The Bureau will make an announcement through a separate Public Notice when the revised FCC Forms become available. In the meantime, the Bureau will continue to honor the FCC’s current ship safety certificates. If, however, any issues arise during an inspection at a foreign port regarding either FCC Form or SOLAS compliance, vessels should contact Ghassan Khalek by e-mail: Ghassan.Khalek@fcc.gov or phone: 202-316-5638; or Katie Knox by e-mail: Katie.Knox@fcc.gov or phone: 717-338-2652 for assistance.

Further, until the updated forms are available, inspectors performing inspections of SOLAS vessels should continue to use the current FCC Forms 806 and 829. If inspectors need to clarify any information on the existing ship safety certificate, they should make notations as needed on the certificate indicating that the vessel is compliant with SOLAS, including all recent amendments.

People with Disabilities. Contact the FCC to request reasonable accommodations (accessible format documents, sign language interpreters, CART, etc.) by e-mail: FCC504@fcc.gov or phone: 202-418-0530 or TTY: 202-418-0432.

Additional Information. For further information regarding this Public Notice, please contact

¹⁷ MSC, *Performance Standards for the Reception of Maritime Safety Information and Search And Rescue Related Information by MF (NAVTEX) and HF (Resolution MSC.508(105))*, [https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.508\(105\).pdf](https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/IndexofIMOResolutions/MSCResolutions/MSC.508(105).pdf) (last visited June 27, 2024). In July 2019, the IEC published IEC 61097-6:2005/AMD2:2019, which is the certification test standard for this IMO performance standard. IEC, *Amendment 2 - Global maritime distress and safety system (GMDSS) – Part 6: Narrowband direct-printing telegraph equipment for the reception of navigational and meteorological warnings and urgent information to ships (NAVTEX)*, <https://webstore.iec.ch/publication/63870> (last visited June 27, 2024).

¹⁸ See *supra* note 1.

¹⁹ FCC, *Certificate of Compliance with the Radio Provisions of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974 (as Amended)*, <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/806.pdf> (last visited Apr. 9, 2024).

²⁰ FCC, *Cargo Ship Safety Radio Certificate*, <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/829.pdf> (last visited June 27, 2024).

²¹ See 1988 SOLAS PROTOCOL, Annex 2–4, Regulation 15 (Forms of certificates and records of equipment) provides, in pertinent part, that certificates “shall be drawn up in the form corresponding to the models given in the appendix to the annex to the present Convention.” Annex 2 *Regulations of the 1974 SOLAS Convention Relevant to the GMDSS, including certificates under the 1974 SOLAS Convention and 78/88 SOLAS Protocols*.

²² FCC, Information Collection Being Reviewed by the Federal Communications Commission, 89 Fed. Reg. 31749 (Apr. 25, 2024), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2024-04-25/pdf/2024-08775.pdf>.

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