

**Commonwealth of Dominica****Office of the Maritime Administrator**

- TO:** ALL SHIPOWNERS, OPERATORS, MASTERS AND OFFICERS OF MERCHANT SHIPS, MOBILE OFFSHORE DRILLING UNITS (MODU's) AND RECOGNIZED ORGANIZATIONS
- SUBJECT:** INMARSAT-C Ship Earth Station - False Distress Alerts
- REFERENCE:** INMARSAT Circular to Routing Organizations dated 20 September 1991
- PURPOSE:** This Circular identifies the problems and concerns of false distress alerts emanating from INMARSAT-C Ship Earth Stations.
- APPLICABILITY:** This Circular applies to Masters and all crewmembers because of the immense waste of time and expense involved in tracing false radio communication alarms of all kinds.

**DESCRIPTION:**

**1.0** INMARSAT's circular is self-explanatory and states:

"There is a high incidence of false distress in the INMARSAT-C system and we request your urgent assistance in our efforts to minimize them. This is causing some concern among LES (Land Earth Station) operators and safety authorities and is undermining the confidence of safety authorities and the maritime community in the INMARSAT-C system."

**2.0** There are several causes of false distress calls, including:

- terminals for land mobile use are being sold without the distress capability being disabled;
- inadvertent accidental operation of the distress alert function during normal operation;

- during "link test" of some terminals an instruction is presented requesting the operator to "press the distress button" to send a test distress call. If the operator responds within two minutes of the printout, a Distress Test Packet (DTP) will be automatically generated. The problem is that an absent SES (Ship Earth Station) operator may see the message sometime later and generate a real distress alert, although the test distress alert has already been sent. This is believed to be one of the main causes of the high rate of false distress calls.

**3.0** Upon receipt of information about false distress alerts from search and rescue authorities, the following actions are appropriate and must be taken by the Administration:

- **Writing to all ships/ship owners sending distress alerts.**
- **EGC (Enhance Group Call) advice to all mobiles.** A suitable worded EGC message has been sent out.
- **Warnings by SES manufacturers.** Notification to manufacturers instructing them to include special text on avoidance of false distress alerts in their user guides.

**4.0** Administrations have been asked to emphasize to MES (Mobile Earth Station) operators the importance of minimizing false distress alerts. MES operators must be aware continuously that a false distress alert is a very serious matter which results in the waste of costly and vital resources by RCC's (Rescue Coordination Centers) and could adversely affect real SAR (Search and Rescue) activities.

The Dominica Maritime Administration urges all personnel to take steps to minimize the number of false distress alerts.

- end -