RESOLUTION A.474(XII)

Adopted on 19 November 1981
Agenda item 10(b)

PROPER USE OF VHF CHANNELS AT SEA

THE ASSEMBLY,

RECALLING Article 16(i) of the Convention on the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization,

NOTING WITH CONCERN the widespread misuse of VHF channels at sea, especially the distress, safety and calling Channel 16 (156.8 MHz) and channels used for port operations, ship movement services and reporting systems,

RECOGNIZING that the misuse of VHF channels is causing serious interference to essential communications and is a potential danger to safety at sea,

RECOGNIZING ALSO that the proper use of VHF channels at sea would make an important contribution to navigational safety,

BEARING IN MIND that in accordance with the ITU Radio Regulations:

(a)   Channel 16 may only be used for distress, urgency and very brief safety communications and for calling to establish other communications which should then be conducted on a suitable working channel,

(b)   On VHF channels allocated to the port operations service the only messages permitted are restricted to those relating to the operational handling, the movement and the safety of ships and, in emergency, to the safety of persons; as the use of these channels for ship-to-ship communications may cause serious interference to communications related to the movement and safety of shipping in congested port areas,

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT that VHF equipment is frequently operated by persons not trained in its proper use,

RECALLING that the ITU Radio Regulations require that the service of every ship radiotelephone station shall be controlled by an operator holding a certificate issued or recognized by the Government concerned,

RECALLING ALSO that, for the certification of masters, chief mates and officers in charge of a navigational watch, the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, requires knowledge of procedures used in radiotelephone communications and ability to use radiotelephones in particular with respect to distress, urgency, safety and navigational messages,

HAVING CONSIDERED the recommendation made by the Maritime Safety Committee at its forty-fourth session,

1.   INVITES Member Governments to ensure that all persons on board controlling the operation of VHF equipment shall have knowledge of procedures used in radiotelephone communications and ability to use radiotelephones in particular with respect to distress, urgency, safety and navigational messages;

2.   REQUESTS Member Governments to take appropriate action to ensure that VHF channels are used correctly and that in particular the following transmissions are avoided:

(a)   Ship-to-ship communications on Channel 16 except for distress communications and for calling to establish other communications which should then be conducted on a suitable working channel;

(b)   Ship-to-ship communications on the channels allocated to port operations, ship movement services and reporting systems, other than those for the movement and safety of shipping;

(c)   Superfluous signals and correspondence;

(d)   Signals without station identification;

3.   ADOPTS the Guidance on the Use of VHF at Sea set out in the Annex to the present resolution;

4.   INVITES Member Governments to bring the Guidance on the Use of VHF at Sea to the attention of all concerned.

ANNEX

GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF VHF AT SEA

1   VHF COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUE

1.1. Preparation

Before transmitting, think about the subjects which have to be communicated and, if necessary, prepare written notes to avoid unnecessary interruptions and ensure that no valuable time is wasted on a busy channel.

1.2   Listening

Listen before commencing to transmit to make certain that the channel is not already in use. This will avoid unnecessary and irritating interference.

1.3   Discipline

VHF equipment should be used correctly and in accordance with the Radio Regulations. The following in particular should be avoided:

.1   calling on Channel 16 for purposes other than distress, urgency and very brief safety communications when another calling channel is available;

.2   communications not related to safety and navigation on port operation channels;

.3   non-essential transmissions, e.g. needless and superfluous signals and correspondence;

.4   transmitting without correct identification;

.5   occupation of one particular channel under poor conditions;

.6   use of offensive language.

1.4 Repetition

Repetition of words and phrases should be avoided unless specifically requested by the receiving station.

1.5 Power reduction

When possible, the lowest transmitter power necessary for satisfactory communication should be used.

1.6 Communications with shore stations

1.6.1 Instructions given on communication matters by shore stations should be obeyed.

1.6.2 Communications should be carried out on the channel indicated by the shore station. When a change of channel is requested, this should be acknowledged by the ship.

1.6.3 On receiving instructions from a shore station to stop transmitting, no further communications should be made until otherwise notified (the shore station may be receiving distress or safety messages and any other transmissions could cause interference).

1.7 Communications with other ships

1.7.1 During ship-to-ship communications the ship called should indicate the channel on which further transmissions should take place. The calling ship should acknowledge acceptance before changing channel.

1.7.2 The listening procedure outlined in paragraph 1.2 should be followed before communications are commenced on the chosen channel.

1.8 Distress communications

1.8.1 Distress calls/messages have absolute priority over all other communications. When hearing them all other transmissions should cease and a listening watch should be kept.

1.8.2 Any distress call/message should be recorded in the ship's log and passed to the master.

1.8.3 On receipt of a distress message, if in the vicinity, immediately acknowledge receipt. If not in the vicinity, allow a short interval of time to elapse before acknowledging receipt of the message in order to permit ships nearer to the distress to do so.

1.9 Calling

1.9.1 Whenever possible, a working frequency should be used. If a working frequency is not available, Channel 16 may be used, provided it is not occupied by a distress call/message.

1.9.2 In case of difficulty to establish contact with a ship or shore station, allow adequate time before repeating the call. Do not occupy the channel unnecessarily and try another channel.

1.10 Changing channels

If communications on a channel are unsatisfactory, indicate change of channel and await confirmation.

1.11 Spelling

If spelling becomes necessary (e.g. descriptive names, call signs, words which could be misunderstood) use the spelling table contained in the International Code of Signals and the Radio Regulations.

1.12 Addressing

The words "I" and "You" should be used prudently. Indicate to whom they refer.

Example:

Seaship, this is Port Radar, Port Radar, do you have a pilot?

Port Radar, this is Seaship, I do have a pilot.

1.13 Watchkeeping

1.13.1   Ships fitted only with VHF equipment should maintain watch on Channel 16 when at sea.

1.13.2   Other ships should, where practicable, keep watch on Channel 16 when within the service area of a shore station capable of operating on that channel.

1.13.3   In certain cases Governments may require ships to keep a watch on other channels.

2   VHF COMMUNICATION PROCEDURE

2.1 Calling

When calling a shore station or another ship, say the name of that shore station or ship once (twice if considered necessary in heavy radio traffic conditions) followed by the phrase THIS IS and the ship's name twice, indicating the channel in use.

Example:

Port City, this is Seastar, Seastar, on Channel 14.

2.2 Exchange of messages

2.2.1   When communicating with a ship whose name is unknown but whose position is known, that position may be used. In this case the call is addressed to all ships.

Example:

Hello all ships, this is Pastoria, Pastoria. Ship approaching number four buoy, I am passing Belinda Bank Light.

2.2.2   Where a message is received and only acknowledgement of receipt is needed, say "received". Where a message is received and acknowledgement of the correct message is required, say "received, understood", and repeat message if considered necessary.

Example:

Message: Your berth will be clear at 0830 hours.

Reply: Received, understood. Berth clear at 0830 hours.

2.2.3   During exchange of messages, a ship should invite a reply by saying "over".

2.2.4   Where appropriate, the following message should be sent:

"Please use/I will use, the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary".

When language difficulties exist which cannot be resolved by use of the Vocabulary, the International Code of Signals should be used.

In this case the word "INTERCO" should precede the groups of the International Code of Signals.

Example:

"Please use/I will use the International Code of Signals".

2.2.5   Where the message contains instructions or advice, the substance should be repeated.

Example:

Message: Advise you pass astern of me.

Reply: I will pass astern of you.

2.2.6   If a message is not properly received, ask for it to be repeated by saying "Say again".

2.2.7   If a message is received but not understood, say "Message not understood".

2.2.8   If it is necessary to change to a different channel say "Change to channel . . ." and wait for acknowledgment before carrying out the change.

2.2.9   The end of a communication is indicated by the word "out".

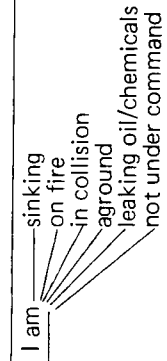## 3   STANDARD MESSAGES

3.1   Since most ship-to-shore communications are exchanges of information, it is advisable to use standard messages which will reduce transmission time.

3.2   Commonly used standard messages are given in the following Table and examples. Further samples of standard messages are given in the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary, which should be used whenever possible.

TABLE OF STANDARD MESSAGES

Type	1 Addressee	2 Nationality of Ship	3 Name of ship	4 Callsign	5 Position	6 Course/speed	7 Last port	8 Destination	9 ETA (pilot or area)	10 Pilot details	11 Gross tonnage/length	12 Draught	13 Cargo (kind and quantity)	14 Stowage	15 Malfunctions	16 Intended route	17 ETA next way point	18 VHF channel	19 Agent	20 Vocabulary, Part III, paragraph	Complement of message
Contacting message	×																	×			
Arrival message (see note 1)	×	×	×	×	×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×				×	4	
ETA message/ETD message	×	×	×	×				×	×											4	
Pilot request message	×		×						×											9	requests pilot
Radar identification message	×		×		×	×														11	
Dangerous cargo message (see note 2)	×		×										×	×							
Way point message	×		×		×												×			7.18	
Anchoring message	×		×		×															3	is anchored
Clearance message	×		×					×								×					requests clearance
Change channel message	×		×															×			change to channel
Incident message (see note 3)	×		×		×										×					2	I am — sinking, on fire, in collision, aground, leaking oil/chemicals, not under command

Note 1: Often sent by radiotelegraphy or radiotelephony.

Note 2: All ships carrying dangerous goods should give prior advice to the port authority at least 24 hours before entry into the port area or where this is not practicable (e.g. short sea passage) as early as possible prior to entry into the port area; see MSC/Circ.299.

Note 3: In the case of a distress, urgency or safety message, the corresponding prefix Mayday, Pan or Sécurité, has to be used.

EXAMPLES OF STANDARD MESSAGES

Message	
First contact message (see note)	Port City, this is Seaship, this is Seaship, on channel 14, over. (addressee)　　　(sender)　　　　(sender)　　　　(VHF channel)
Arrival message	Port City, this is United Country ship Seaship, (addressee)　　　(nationality)　　(sender) call sign Alpha Bravo Charlie Delta, from Lake Town, (call sign)　　　　　　　　(last port) to harbour No. 2, ETA 1400, I require a river pilot, (destination)　　(ETA)　　　　　(pilot details) my length is 150 metres, my draught is 9 metres, I am carrying dangerous cargo, (gross tonnage/length)　　　(draught) 300 tons IMDG Class 4.1, in No. 4 hold, my forecastle is damaged and my radar is not working, (cargo)　　　　　　(stowage)　　　　　　　　　　　(malfunctions) my Agent is Cargo Services Company, over. (agent)
ETA message	Pilot station, this is Island Republic ship Seaship, (addressee)　　　　(nationality)　　　(sender) call sign Mike Oscar Pappa Delta, (call sign) my ETA pilot station 0600, over. (ETA)
Pilot request message	Port City, this is Seaship, I am bound for North Harbour, ETA 0600, (addressee)　　　(sender)　　　　　　　　(destination)　　　　(ETA) I require a pilot, over.

Note:　Call on working channel. Only use Channel 16 when working channel is not known.

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EXAMPLES OF STANDARD MESSAGES

Message	
Radar identification message	Radar Station, this is Seaship, my position is 090 degrees two miles from lighthouse, (addressee) (sender) (position) course 300, speed 20 knots, over (course/speed)
Dangerous cargo message	Port City, this is Seaship, I am carrying 100 tons CHLOROBENZENE, IMDG CLASS 3.3, UN No. 1134, (addressee) (sender) (dangerous cargo) in Centre tank No. 7, etc, etc, over. (stowage)
Way point message	Port City, this is Seaship, I am at way point No. 1, (addressee) (sender) (position) my ETA way point No.2 at 1600, over. (ETA next way point)
Anchoring message	Port City, this is Seaship, I am anchored in position 200 degrees one mile from breakwater, over. (addressee) (sender) (position)
Clearance message	Port City, this is Seaship, I am berthed at Harbour Quay, bound for the Roads, via South Channel, (addressee) (sender) (position) (destination) (intended route) I request clearance, over
Change of channel message	Port City, this is Seaship, change to channel 10, over. (addressee) (sender) (VHF channel) *Note:* Await acknowledgement before changing.

EXAMPLES OF INCIDENT MESSAGES

Message		
Distress		
(1) Call	MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY, this is **Seaship, Seaship, Seaship, Seaship,** (prefix 3 x) (sender 3 x)	
(2) Message	Mayday, **Seaship, my position is 180 degrees one mile from buoy number 10,** (position) I am sinking, I require immediate assistance, over.	
Urgency		
(1) Call	PAN PAN, PAN PAN, PAN PAN Hello all stations, Hello all stations, this is **Seaship, Seaship, Seaship,** (prefix 3 x) (3 x)	
(2) Message*	**my position is 180 degrees one mile from buoy number 10,** (position) I have been in collision and need the assistance of a tug.	
Safety		
(1) Call	Sécurité, Sécurité, Sécurité Hello all stations, Hello all stations, this is **Seaship, Seaship, Seaship,** (prefix 3 x) (3 x)	
(2) Message**	**my position is 180 degrees one mile from buoy number 10,** (position) my engines are broken down and I am anchoring in the northbound traffic lane. Request ships keep clear, over.	
Minor incident	Other minor incidents may occur within harbour limits when it is desirable to notify the harbour office as follows: **Port City,** this is **Seaship, my position is 180 degrees one mile from buoy number 10,** (addressee) (sender) (position) I have lost my anchor and buoyed it in position two miles East of Head Point, over.	

* Messages preceded by the urgency signal are normally addressed to "all stations" but may be addressed to a particular station. Whichever chosen would be included in the call after PAN PAN.

** Messages preceded by the safety signals are normally addressed to "all stations" but may be addressed to a particular station. Whichever chosen would be included in the call after Sécurité. The announcement should be made on Channel 16 but the message shall be transmitted, where practicable, on a working frequency.