



Recovery of persons from the water

On 1 July 2014 a new requirement regarding ship specific procedures for the recovery of persons from the water will become mandatory.

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The new requirement is included in an amendment to SOLAS Reg.III/17-1 and requires all ships to have plans and procedures on board identifying the equipment to be used for recovery purposes and the measures to be taken to minimise the danger to shipboard personnel involved in recovery operations. New ships must comply with the requirement from 1 July 2014, while existing ships must comply by the first intermediate or first renewal survey of the ship after that date, whichever comes first.

A recovery process involving people in distress at sea will in many cases be challenging and dangerous and the prevailing circumstances will differ from incident to incident. The Master and crew of a ship responding to an emergency may have little or no notice before they need to take action, limited information about the actual situation and no specialised recovery equipment available on board. Therefore, having proper plans and procedures of how to proceed in such an emergency is of vital importance.

Members and clients are advised to carefully prepare each ship for emergencies involving recovery of persons from the water. By the applicable date on or after 1 July 2014, relevant procedures should be implemented on board as a part of the emergency preparedness plan required by the ISM Code. As basis for the procedures, a risk assessment of all recovery methods under consideration should be conducted, taking into account the equipment to be used, anticipated environmental conditions and ship specific characteristics. Of equal importance is to ensure that the crew is familiar with the plans and procedures and trained to operate the available equipment.

In summary, safe and efficient recovery of persons from the water will require a ship operator to:

- assess his equipment;
- plan its appropriate use;
- assign people to operate it; and
- train people so they know how to operate it.

The following IMO documents provide useful guidance for this purpose:

- Guidelines for the Development of Plans and Procedures for Recovery of Persons from the Water ([MSC.1/Circ.1447](#))
- Guide to Recovery Techniques ([MSC.1/Circ.1182](#))
- Guide for Cold Water Survival ([MSC.1/Circ.1185/Rev.1](#))²

¹ Ships constructed (having their keel laid) before 1 July 2014. ² See also Gard Alert "[Maximising the chances of survival in cold water](#)" dated 24 January 2014.