

A pocket guide to

Recovery Techniques

2014 EDITION



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MSC.1/Circ.1182/Rev.1
21 November 2014

GUIDE TO RECOVERY TECHNIQUES

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its ninety-fourth session (17 to 21 November 2014), with a view to providing specific guidance to seafarers on recovery techniques, approved the Guide on recovery techniques, prepared by the Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue at its first session (30 June to 4 July 2014), as set out in the annex.

2 This circular revokes MSC.1/Circ.1182.

3 Member Governments and international organizations in consultative status are invited to bring the annexed guide to the attention of all concerned, in particular distribution to seafarers.

4 Member Governments, international organizations and others concerned are encouraged to enhance the attached Guide with pictorial and other relevant information, as appropriate.

ANNEX

GUIDE TO RECOVERY TECHNIQUES

1 INTRODUCTION: YOUR PART IN RECOVERY AT SEA

1.1 As a seafarer, you may have to recover people in distress at sea. This might be someone overboard from your own ship – a fellow crew member, or a passenger – or your ship might be responding to someone else's emergency; for example, a ship abandoned because of flooding or fire, or a ditched aircraft. You may have little warning, and lives may be in your hands.

1.2 In many areas of the world, especially when out of range of shore-based search and rescue (SAR) facilities, your ship may be the first, or the only, rescue unit to arrive in time. Even if you are joined by specialized units, you will still have a vital role to play, especially in a major incident involving many people.

1.3 Many ships are required to have ship-specific plans and procedures for recovery of persons from the water,¹ and IMO has agreed that it is beneficial to have recovery procedures planned for any vessel.² This guide also considers recovery from small craft such as liferafts, etc.

1.4 If you are required to recover people in distress, it is your capability that matters. To ensure that you can respond safely and effectively, you need to know the plans and procedures for recovery specific to your ship and to think about the general issues *beforehand*.

1.5 The recovery process is often difficult. For example, it may be complicated by:

- .1 the size of your ship: survivors may have to climb or be lifted considerable distances to get aboard;
- .2 differences in relative movement between your ship and the craft or people alongside: it may be difficult to stay alongside or for survivors to get onto ladders, etc. or in through shell openings; and
- .3 the physical capability of those to be recovered: they may be able to do little or nothing to help themselves.

1.9 This guide discusses these problems and some solutions. It suggests practical recovery techniques which have been used successfully to recover people in distress at sea.

2 AIMS AND CONTENTS OF THIS GUIDE

2.1 This guide focuses on recovery and the work you may have to do to achieve it. It is intended to be used as a reference document. You should read it now and you should refer to it again while proceeding to the scene of the emergency, as part of your preparation for the recovery operation.

¹ SOLAS regulation III/17-1

² Resolution MSC.346(91)

2.2 The guide's principal aims are to help *you* – as master or crew of a responding ship – to:

- .1 ASSESS and decide upon appropriate means of recovery aboard your own vessel;
- .2 TRAIN in the use of these means of recovery, in general preparation for emergencies; and
- .3 PREPARE yourself and your vessel when actually responding to an emergency.

2.3 This guide includes and supports the recovery guidance in Volume III of the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual, "Mobile Facilities", which should be available on board.

2.4 Recovery – getting people in distress into your ship – is just a part of the overall rescue operation. For guidance on SAR operations as a whole you should refer to the IAMSAR Manual.

2.5 For simplicity, this guide refers to lifeboats, liferafts, etc. as "survival craft". It is also possible that you will be recovering people from other small craft such as small SAR units; directly from small vessels in distress such as yachts or fishing boats; or from the water, etc. In general the same recovery principles apply throughout.

2.6 The guidance is set out as follows:

Possible recovery problems	section 3
Planning considerations	section 4
Providing assistance <i>before</i> recovery	section 5
The recovery process – general considerations	section 6
The approach	section 7
Rescue craft and lines	section 8
Getting people aboard – factors to consider	section 9
Climbing and lifting	section 10
Providing assistance when standing by	section 11
The immediate care of people recovered	section 12
Recovery checklist	appendix

3 THE TASK OF RECOVERY: POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

3.1 When proceeding to the scene of an emergency at sea, you will probably only have limited information about what you will find when you get there. What you may find are people in survival craft or in the water. You should prepare for their recovery.

3.2 Unless it is properly prepared for, the recovery process may be a difficult and dangerous operation. The following are some of the problems which you may have to face.

- .1 Recovery from survival craft is not simple – see section 3.3 below.
- .2 In a man-overboard situation, or in a rapid or uncontrolled abandonment when not everybody has been able to get into survival craft, you may find people in the water, or clinging to floating wreckage, etc. These people are less likely to be able to help themselves than if they were in survival craft. Nor will they survive so long.

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- .3 People may still be aboard the craft in distress and direct recovery may be required, without the intermediate use of survival craft.
 - .4 Small craft are especially vulnerable if they are in close proximity to your ship. Their masts, rigging or other gear may become entangled and there is the danger of crushing or other damage as the two vessels move in the seaway.
 - .5 People may need to be recovered from other places which they have reached before your arrival (rocks, reefs, sandbanks, shorelines only accessible from the sea, navigational marks, moored vessels, etc.).
 - .6 In addition to recovering people yourself, you may have to receive people from other SAR units such as rescue boats or helicopters. These units may wish to transfer people to your ship rather than take them directly ashore, so that they can return to pick up others more quickly. Many of the problems associated with recovering people from survival craft also apply to the transfer of people from (small) rescue boats into (large) ships.
 - .7 Transfer from helicopters has its own special requirements, including training and preparation on board – see IAMSAR Volume III.

3.3 There are likely to be further complications, even after a controlled evacuation in which people have entered survival craft successfully.

- .1 Types of survival craft vary.
 - .1 Powered survival craft may be able to manoeuvre themselves alongside your ship but those without power cannot do so.
 - .2 Many survival craft are covered and these covers may not be removable. Getting out of enclosed survival craft may be difficult when the craft is in a seaway, particularly if the exit points are small.
- .2 Those awaiting recovery may lack the ability to help themselves or others. This may be because of injury, illness (including seasickness after a period in a survival craft), the effects of cold or heat, age (whether elderly or very young) or infirmity.
- .3 People awaiting recovery may have little or no experience of transferring between small craft and larger ones such as your ship. For example, stepping onto a pilot ladder and then climbing it is not difficult for a fit person used to doing so – but it may be effectively impossible for others.
- .4 There may be language difficulties. If instructions are not properly understood, the consequences can be dangerous. You may not have a language in common with the person to be recovered, and even when you do they may not understand your instructions.
- .5 There may be a large number of people to recover. In the case of a passenger ship, this number may amount to hundreds or even thousands of people. This possibility brings additional problems with it, including:
 - .1 SCALE: the sheer size of the problem can be daunting and the stress of the situation may lead you to lose focus and efficiency.

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- .2 PRIORITY: who should be recovered first? It is clear that people in the water should take priority over those in survival craft. It is less clear whether the injured or infirm should take priority over the more capable, who can be recovered more quickly.
 - .3 RESOURCES: facilities aboard your ship may become overwhelmed. Survivors will need shelter, warmth, water, food and, probably, some medical attention.
 - .4 PEOPLE: you will need sufficient numbers of people to navigate your ship, to operate the means of recovery and to escort those recovered to shelter.

4 PLANNING FOR RECOVERY

4.1 The circumstances you find when you arrive will differ from incident to incident; but general planning must be done.

4.2 When planning how best to bring people aboard your ship you should consider:

- .1 who will be required for the recovery process;
- .2 who will manage the ship in the meantime;
- .3 what can be done to help people prior to recovery;
- .4 the means of recovery available to you;
- .5 where on the ship the survivors should be taken after recovery;
- .6 how they will be looked after once they are aboard; and
- .7 how you will keep your own crew and any passengers informed of what is going on.

4.3 Make sure everyone understands the recovery plan and their own place in it, and have everyone ready, with all the equipment they need, before commencing the operation.

4.4 You may not have much time to think about details when the emergency happens; but if you have thought about your capabilities beforehand and you have trained to use them effectively – in short, if you are *prepared* – you will not need much time.

4.5 Remember that plans are of no use unless you know how to put them into effect. This requires training, and the testing of both plans and training by conducting drills.

5 PROVIDING ASSISTANCE PRIOR TO RECOVERY

5.1 People can still die after you have found them but before you can get them on board. Recovery takes time – and those in distress may not have much time, especially if they are in the water, unprotected and/or unsupported. You should be ready to help them stay alive until you are able to recover them.

5.2 Depending on how long the recovery is likely to take, they may need:

- .1 buoyancy aids such as lifebuoys, lifejackets and liferafts;