

Before the  
Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20554

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

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**AMENDMENT OF THE 1974 SAFETY  
OF LIFE AT SEA CONVENTION**

The Conference of Contracting Governments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974 on the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS Conference) was held at the Headquarters of the International Maritime Organization in London from 31 October to 11 November 1988. The purpose of the Conference was to consider and adopt amendments to the 1974 SOLAS Convention to introduce the GMDSS. The SOLAS Convention applies to cargo ships of 300 tons and above, and to ships carrying more than 12 passengers which are engaged on international voyages.

The amendments adopted by the GMDSS Conference are deemed to have been accepted by 1 February 1990, unless one third of the Contracting Governments, or Contracting Governments the combined merchant fleets of which constitute not less than fifty percent of the gross tonnage of the World's merchant fleet object. The amendments essentially replace the existing manual Morse code ship-to-ship radiotelegraphy system with a fully automatic ship-to-shore distress alerting system using terrestrial and satellite data communication systems. The time required to bring assistance to vessels in distress using the GMDSS will be significantly reduced when compared to the existing system.

The GMDSS will significantly improve the safety of life and property at sea the world over through incorporation of advanced communication technology. Provisions have been made for rapid alerting and identification of ships. The GMDSS requires the carriage of two separate and independent radiocommunication systems for alerting designated authorities to a distress situation.

The SOLAS amendments adopted in London provide flexibility in choice of means for maintaining shipboard equipment carried for safety and distress purposes, a choice between on-board maintenance, shore-based maintenance, duplication of equipment necessary to ensure availability of communications or a combination of these means as determined by Administrations.

The amendments to the 1974 SOLAS Convention adopted by the 66 Contracting Governments attending the GMDSS Conference were fully consistent with objectives developed in the U.S. preparatory process. The Commission staff and U.S. Coast Guard, in conjunction with the interested government agencies, maritime labor and maritime management representatives participated in the development of the GMDSS over a ten year period. Consequential changes will need to be made to the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, to accommodate the GMDSS and to amend the existing provisions which require ships to carry radiotelephone and Morse radiotelegraphy systems for safety purposes.

Significant dates concerning the GMDSS are as follows:

SOLAS Amendments in force 1 February 1992

Satellite emergency position indication  
radiobeacons and NAVTEX equipment  
for ships to receive  
broadcasts of maritime  
safety information 1 August 1993

GMDSS equipment required  
on new ships 1 February 1995

GMDSS equipment required on all  
subject ships  
(final implementation) 1 February 1999

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