

M-Notices - September 2009

MGN396 (M+F) Compatibility of Life-Saving Equipment

Because of concerns over the unsuitability of some immersion suits and lifejackets when used in combination, the Maritime & Coastguard Agency has published this guidance note.

Standards for lifejackets and immersion suit specifications are outlined within the Life Saving Appliances Code, but, this notice warns that they do not fully address the wider issue of compatibility and suitability of lifejackets and immersions when worn together, such as buoyancy, flotation position and self-righting performance.

The LSA Code tests for immersion suits do not necessarily ensure that any given type of immersion suit is compatible with any given lifejackets, it points out.

Extra care should be taken where the lifejacket is of a design with 'behind the neck' buoyancy – a type of life jacket which, the MCA warns, 'could actually lead to a survivor being inclined head-down in the water when worn in combination with an immersion suit'.

Advice should be sought, it says, from the chandler/manufacturer when considering using lifejackets and immersion suits in combination.

The MCA guidance draws attention to the International Safety Management Code, by which companies must establish safeguards against all identified risks and warns that 'the shipowner or operator is responsible for ensuring... that the LSA system as a whole is fit for purpose... and that sufficient suits are provided in sizes appropriate... for all persons onboard.'

Lifejackets should also not impede access to survival craft, it states. 'By extension, the combined use of lifejackets and immersion suits must provide for an efficient means of abandonment.'

The M-note has also annexed IMO guidance on wearing immersion suits in totally enclosed lifeboats.

MIN350 (M) Research Project 592: Investigation into the Safety of Ro-Ro Passenger Ships fitted with Long Lower Holds – Phase II

New SOLAS safety of life at sea regulations on damage stability for dry cargo and passenger ships came into force in January. But, as this M-note points out, the MCA and the Netherlands Ministry of Transport have for some time shared concerns that new regulations 'may not fully take into account the special vulnerability of ro-ro vessels'. So they jointly commissioned research to assess the level of survivability of ro-ro passenger ships fitted with long lower holds (LHH) 'which are minimally compliant with these regulations'.

Two new 1,000-passenger capacity ro-ro ships were designed, each with different internal subdivision arrangements within the same external hull, but optimised for SOLAS '09 compliance to have as low a freeboard and as large an LHH space as possible. One was fitted with B/5 longitudinal bulkheads in way of the LLH, and the other with B/10 bulkheads. The damage stability characteristics of each ship were compared through statistical analysis of 'time to capsize' covering a wide range of damage scenarios and sea states.

Researchers found that the level of survivability implied in SOLAS '95 is not consistent for different ship designs, the M-note states. The research concluded that the MCA should seek revisions to SOLAS '09 to try to eliminate, or substantially reduce, 'the worrying vulnerability of ro-ro passenger ships, particularly where straightforward, feasible damages resulting in rapid capsizing and very heavy casualties are entirely permissible'.

The MCA is coordinating a correspondence group that is investigating the issues raised, to report to the IMO in January 2010.

MIN353 (M+F) Research Project 595: Tracking and Predicting the Behaviour of Submerged and Sunken Oils

With carriage of very heavy fuel oils (VHFOs) increasing in UK waters, there is growing concern since incidents such as the Prestige and the Erika that available monitoring and recovery technology is inadequate. This M-note summarises MCA-commissioned research into the processes that can lead to sinking and submergence of oils, and how this might be predicted and responded to.

MIN351 (M+F) Research Project 608 – Customer Population Survey in the Sports and recreation Sector

The notice gives details of MCA commissioned surveys on participation rates for 21 marine leisure activities at British coastal and key inland water sites.

MIN349 (M) Solid Bulk Cargoes – Adoption of the International Maritime Solid Bulk Cargoes (IMSBC) Code

The new IMSBC Code supersedes the existing Code of Safe Practice for Solid Bulk Cargoes 2004, and will become mandatory from 1 January 2011. Until then, the MCA suggests that, to facilitate safe transport, its provisions may be applied on a voluntary basis.

MGN395 (M+F) Radio Log Book: Merchant Shipping & Fishing Vessels

The notice advises on the need for the GMDSS log book and the simplified F/V GMDSS log book to comply with either Part II of the Merchant Shipping (Radio Installation) Regulations 1998, or Part III of the Merchant Shipping (Radio) (Fishing Vessel) Regulations 1999.