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Marine Circular No. 13/2025

To: Owners, Operators, Agents, Masters and Officers of Merchant Ships, Authorized Classification Societies and Surveyors and Interested Parties

Summary

1. This Notice accompanies and should be read alongside the Merchant Shipping (Safety of Life at Sea) Regulations 2025 (“the SOLAS Regulations”).
2. Its purpose is:
 - (1) to list the UK Merchant Shipping Notices (MSNs) and Marine Guidance Notice (MGNs) that have been adopted in the Virgin Islands and which relate to ships to which the SOLAS Regulations apply; and
 - (2) explain the effect of these MSNs and MGNs.
3. The Notice does not apply to Virgin Islands ships which are within the scope of and are surveyed and certified under the Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Small Commercial Vessel) Regulations 2004, the Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Cargo Ship Safety) Regulations 2025 or the Merchant Shipping (Safety of Commercial Sailing and Motor Vessels) Regulations 2004.

Introduction

1. This Notice is issued under section 6 of the Virgin Islands Shipping and Maritime Authority Act 2023 and regulation 12 of the Merchant Shipping (Safety of Life at Sea) Regulations 2025. (“the SOLAS Regulations”).
2. The SOLAS Regulations make provision for the safety of ships and implement the requirements of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (“SOLAS Convention”).
3. This Notice supplements and provides guidance on the requirements of the SOLAS Convention implemented by the SOLAS Regulations and indicates how the Virgin Islands Shipping and Maritime Authority (“VISMA”) will interpret these requirements,

by adopting Merchant Shipping Notices (“MSNs”) and Marine Guidance Notes (“MGNs”) produced by the United Kingdom’s Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Application

4. This Notice applies to Virgin Island ships which
 - (a) sail on international voyages;
 - (b) are within the scope of the SOLAS Regulations; and
 - (c) Are surveyed and certified in accordance with the SOLAS Regulations.
5. The Notice does not apply to Virgin Islands ships which are within the scope of and are surveyed and certified under the Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Small Commercial Vessel) Regulations 2004, the Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Cargo Ship Safety) Regulations 2025 or the Merchant Shipping (Safety of Commercial Sailing and Motor Vessels) Regulations 2004.

Adoption of United Kingdom Merchant Shipping Notices and Marine Guidance Notes

6. Under section 6 of the Virgin Islands Shipping and Maritime Authority Act 2023 (“VISMA Act”), the VISMA may:
 - (a) issue notices for the purpose of any Virgin Islands shipping legislation; or
 - (b) adopt any notices or similar instruments issued by any international or regional organisations or national maritime authority which, in the opinion of the VISMA Managing Director of VISMA, are applicable to the Virgin Islands and shall have mandatory effect for the purposes of any Virgin Island shipping legislation; or
 - (c) issue general guidance notices for the purposes of any Virgin Island shipping legislation; or
 - (d) adopt guidance issued by any international or regional organisations or national maritime authority which, in the opinion of the VISMA Managing Director is applicable to the Virgin Islands and is relevant to any Virgin Island shipping legislation.
7. In addition, under regulation 12 of the SOLAS Regulations the Minister may issue or adopt notices in relation to the SOLAS Regulations, the SOLAS Convention or a Code issued under the SOLAS Convention.
8. The Merchant Shipping Notices (“MSNs”) and Marine Guidance Notices (“MGNs”) listed in **Annex-1** to this Notice are hereby adopted as being applicable to the Virgin Islands and relevant to the SOLAS Regulations, subject to the modifications set out in section 5.

Effect of the adopted MSNs and MGNs

9. The SOLAS Regulations give effect in the Virgin Islands to the provisions of the SOLAS Convention by incorporating the provisions of the SOLAS Convention and mandatory Codes issued under the Convention into Virgin Islands law. The adopted MSNs and MGNs supplement these requirements and provide guidance on how they should be interpreted.
10. The VISMA Act provides that:
 - (1) Where any notice or instrument issued or adopted under section 6(1) is referred to in any Virgin Islands shipping legislation, an owner or master of a ship shall, to the extent specified in the Virgin Islands shipping legislation, comply with the notice (section 6(6));
 - (2) Without prejudice to the foregoing paragraph, in discharging a duty under any Virgin Islands Shipping legislation, the owner or master of a ship shall have regard to any relevant provision of a notice, instrument or guidance issued or adopted under section 6 (section 6(7)); and
 - (3) When exercising any function under a Virgin Islands Shipping legislation, the Managing Director or a surveyor or inspector appointed under the Merchant Shipping Act 2001 shall have regard to any relevant provision of a notice, instrument or guidance issued or adopted (section 6(9)).
11. Regulation 12 of the SOLAS Regulations further provides that any person who exercises or performs a power or duty under the SOLAS Regulations shall have regard to any relevant provision of a notice issued or adopted.
12. Section 6(8) of the VISMA Act provides that a failure to have regard to any relevant provision of a notice, instrument or guidance issued or adopted may be taken into account in any enforcement proceedings, adjudication or compliance assessment by any court, arbitrator, the Managing Director or a surveyor or inspector appointed under the Merchant Shipping Act 2001 when determining whether the owner or master of a ship has complied with their duties under any Virgin Islands Shipping legislation.
13. Accordingly, the owner or master of a ship to which the SOLAS Regulations apply shall
 - (a) comply with the provisions of the adopted UK MSNs listed in the Schedule in so far as they contain requirements that are relevant to the ship; and
 - (b) otherwise have regard to the provisions of the adopted UK MSNs and MGNs listed in the Schedule in so far as they are relevant to the ship.

Modifications to the MSNs and MGNs

A. General modifications

14. In order for the adopted MSNs and MGNs to apply to the Virgin Islands, references to the terms set out in the first column of the table below should be read as references to the equivalent terms in the Virgin Islands set out in the second column.

| Term used in the MSN or MGN | Equivalent term used in the Virgin Islands |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Inspector | An inspector appointed in accordance with section 414(5) of the Merchant Shipping Act 2001 |
| Maritime and Coastguard Agency | VISMA |
| Secretary of State | VISMA |
| Surveyor | A surveyor appointed in accordance with section 414(1)(b) of the Merchant Shipping Act 2001 or a recognised organisation authorised in accordance with section 414(2) as is appropriate in the context of the provision in the MSN or MGN |
| United Kingdom or UK | The Virgin Islands |
| United Kingdom waters or UK water | Virgin Islands waters |

15. References in the MSNs and MGNs to UK Regulations should be read as references to the SOLAS Regulations as appropriate and references to specific regulations should be read as references to the equivalent regulations in the SOLAS Regulations.
16. In the event of any conflict between:
- (a) a provision in the SOLAS Convention and the MSN or MGN, the provision in the SOLAS Convention shall prevail; and
 - (b) a provision in the SOLAS Regulations and the MSN or MGN, the provision in the SOLAS Regulations shall prevail.

B. Classification of ships

17. In some of the adopted MSNs and MGNs, reference is made to classes of ships. Such a classification is not used in the Virgin Islands. For the purposes of applying these classifications to the Virgin Islands, the following classifications should be used:

Passenger Ships

Class I: ships engaged on voyages any of which are long international voyages;

Class II: ships engaged only on short international voyages;

Class II(A): ships engaged on voyages of any kind other than international voyages, which are not:

(i) ships of Classes III to VI(A) as defined in this classification;

(ii) ships which are engaged only on domestic voyages;

Class III: ships engaged only on voyages in the course of which they are at no time more than 70 miles by sea from their point of departure and not more than 18 miles from a coast, and which are at sea only in favourable weather and during restricted periods;

Class IV/V: ships engaged only on voyages in Virgin Islands internal waters;

Class VI: ships engaged only on voyages with not more than 250 passengers on board, to sea in all cases in favourable weather and during restricted periods, in the course of which the ships are at no time more than 15 miles from their point of departure nor more than 3 miles from land;

Class VI(A): ships carrying not more than 50 passengers for a distance of not more than 6 miles and which do not proceed for a distance of more than 3 miles from land;

Ships other than Passenger Ships

Class VII: ships (other than ships of Classes I, VII(A), VII(T), XI and XII engaged on voyages any of which are long international voyages;

Class VII(A): ships employed as fish processing or canning factory ships, and ships engaged in the carriage of persons employed in the fish processing or canning industries;

Class VII(T): tankers engaged on voyages any of which are long international voyages;

Class VIII: ships other than ships of Classes II, VIII(T), IX, XI and XII engaged only on short international voyages;

Class VIII(A): ships, other than ships of Classes II(A) to VI(A) inclusive, VIII(A)(T), IX, IX(A), IX(A)(T), XI and XII, engaged only on voyages which are not international voyages;

Class VIII(T): tankers engaged on voyages any of which are short international voyages;

Class VIII(A)(T): tankers engaged only on voyages which are not international voyages;

Class IX: tugs and tenders, other than ships of Classes II, II(A), III, VI and VI(A), which proceed to sea but are not engaged on long international voyages;

Class IX(A): ships, other than ships of Classes IV to VI inclusive, which do not proceed to sea;

Class IX(A)(T): tankers which do not proceed to sea;

Class XI: sailing ships, other than fishing vessels and ships of Class XII, which proceed to sea; and

Class XII: pleasure vessels of 13.7 metres in length or over

18. In this classification:

“domestic voyage” means a voyage which begins and ends in the Virgin Islands and during which the ship does not call in any other State or Territory;

“long international voyage” means a voyage which is not a short international voyage;

“restricted period” means a period falling wholly within the following limits—

(a) from 1st April to 31st October, both dates inclusive; and

(b) between one hour before sunrise and one hour after sunset in the case of ships fitted with navigation lights conforming to the regulations for the prevention of collisions and between sunrise and sunset in the case of any other ships;

“sea” does not include Virgin Islands internal waters

“short international voyage” means an international voyage—

(a) in the course of which a ship is not more than 200 miles from a port or place in which the passengers and crew could be placed in safety; and

(b) which does not exceed 600 nautical miles in distance between the last port of call in the country in which the voyage begins and the final port of destination,

and, for the purposes of paragraph (b), the final port of destination is the last port of call in the scheduled voyage at which the ship commences its return voyage to the country in which the voyage began;

“Virgin Island internal waters” includes waters inland of the baseline for measuring the Virgin Islands’ territorial sea and enclosed bays and sounds; and

“voyage” includes an excursion.

Contact Details

19. Any question concerning the application of this Notice or an adopted MSN or MGN in respect of a Virgin Islands ship may be referred to VISMA.

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Issued by the Virgin Islands Shipping and Maritime Authority with approval of the Minister.

Mr. John Samuel

Managing Director

Virgin Islands Shipping and Maritime Authority

Issue Date: 2025-10-17

ANNEX-1

LIST OF ADOPTED UNITED KINGDOM SHIPPING NOTICES AND MARINE GUIDANCE NOTES

Below is a comprehensive list of the MSNs and MGNs from Parts 1 through 17 of the SOLAS Regulations that are adopted in the Virgin Islands and which are especially pertinent to vessels registered in the British Virgin Islands (BVI). Each entry includes the associated hyperlink.

BVI-Relevant Considerations

Vessels registered in the British Virgin Islands are required to adhere to international standards that mirror many UK and SOLAS-derived regulations. The selected MSNs and MGNs, while highlighting the elements most relevant to ensuring that BVI-flagged vessels, cover the key aspects of:

- **Design, Equipment, and Emerging Technologies** (ensuring vessel construction and onboard systems are compliant);
- **Structural Integrity and Stability** (vital for safe construction and operation on international voyages);
- **Fire Safety and Life-Saving Appliances** (crucial for onboard emergency preparedness);
- **Communications and Navigational Safety** (ensuring continuous contact and compliance with safety systems such as GMDSS and ECDIS);
- **Cargo and Dangerous Goods Handling** (key for commercial vessels carrying varied cargoes);
- **Specialized Operations and Certification** (covering high-speed craft, nuclear, and polar operations, as well as the certification processes); and
- **Safety Management and Verification** (supporting the operational, survey, and certification regimes required under international and SOLAS standards).

1. Vessel Design, Equipment Conformity, and Emerging Technologies

- [MSN 1851 – Large Commercial Yacht Code](#)
Establishes design, equipment, and operational standards for large commercial yachts.
- [MSN 1874 – Marine Equipment Conformity Assessment Procedures](#)
Sets out procedures for verifying that marine equipment complies with approved standards.
- [MGN 557 – Marine Equipment Market Surveillance, Strategy, Reporting and Enforcement](#)
Provides guidance on oversight and enforcement of equipment standards.
- [MGN 674 – Application of the Special Purpose Ships Code](#)
Outlines how to apply the code for vessels built for specialized operations.
- [MGN 680 – Procedure for Becoming a UK Nominated Body](#)
Describes the process for organizations seeking recognition as certification bodies.

- [MGN 702 – Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships \(MASS\) Requirements](#)
Covers requirements for small autonomous vessels.
- [MGN 705 – Remotely Operated Unmanned Vessels \(ROUVs\) Requirements](#)
Sets standards for remotely operated vessels in a specified size range.

2. Construction, Stability, and Structural Integrity

- [MSN 1359 – Emergency Equipment Lockers for RO/RO Passenger Ships](#)
- [MSN 1671 – Cargo Ship Construction Regulations \(Schedules\)](#)
(Also see its Amendment 2 below.)
- [MSN 1671 Amendment 2 – Cargo Ship Construction \(Amended\)](#)
- [MSN 1698 – Passenger Ship Construction: Classes I, II and II\(A\)](#)
(Including Amendment 1 below.)
- [MSN 1698 Amendment 1 – Passenger Ship Construction: Classes I, II and II\(A\)](#)
- [MSN 1699 – Passenger Ship Construction: Classes III to VI\(A\)](#)
(With Amendments 1, 2, and 3 below.)
- [MSN 1699 Amendment 1 – Passenger Ship Construction: Classes III to VI\(A\)](#)
- [MSN 1699 Amendment 2 – Passenger Ship Construction: Classes III to VI\(A\)](#)
- [MSN 1699 Amendment 3 – Passenger Ship Construction: Classes III to VI\(A\)](#)
- [MSN 1737 – Helicopter Emergency Landing Areas](#)
- [MSN 1790 Amendment 1 – Stability \(Application to Ships Built Before 1 January 2009\)](#)
- [MGN 322 – Ship Survey Standards](#)
- [MGN 426 – External Access to Means of Escape](#)
- [MGN 516 – Ship Construction and Equipment: Use and Application of IMO Codes](#)
- [MGN 611 – Damage Stability: Alternative Verification Method for Tankers](#)
- [MGN 651 – Bilge Alarms on Cargo Ships \(24m or more in length and under 500 GT\)](#)
- [MGN 670 – Guidance on the Merchant Shipping \(Cargo and Passenger Ship Construction\) Regulations 2022](#)
- [MGN 671 – Subdivision and Damage Stability of Cargo Ships \(80m and over\)](#)
- [MGN 689 – Amendments to International Conventions and Mandatory Instruments \(Watertight Doors on Cargo Ships\)](#)
- [MGN 692 – Revised Notes to SOLAS Chapter II-1 Subdivision and Damage Stability Regulations](#)
- [MGN 693 – Amendments to SOLAS Chapter II-1 \(IGF Code\)](#)

3. Fire Protection, Detection, and Extinction

- [MSN 1665 – Amendment 1: Fire Fighting Equipment \(Fire Protection\)](#)
- [MSN 1666 – Amendment 1: Fixed Fire Detection Alarm and Extinguishing Systems](#)
- [MSN 1667 – Amendment 1: Fire Integrity of Bulkheads, Deck and Ventilation \(Passenger Ships\)](#)
- [MSN 1668 – Amendment 1: Fire Integrity of Bulkheads, Deck and Ventilation in Cargo Ships](#)
- [MSN 1669 – Amendment 1: Special Fire Safety Measures for Ships Carrying Dangerous Goods](#)
- [MSN 1670 – Amendment 2: Fire Protection Regulations \(2023/1998\)](#)
- [MSN 1900 – The Merchant Shipping \(Fire Protection\) Regulations](#)
- [MSN 1901 – The Merchant Shipping \(Fire Protection\) Regulations 2023](#)
- [MSN 1902 – The Merchant Shipping \(Fire Protection\) Regulations 2023](#)
- [MGN 276 – Amendment 1: Maintenance of Portable Fire Extinguishers](#)
- [MGN 355 – Periodic Inspection, Testing and Maintenance of Fixed Bulk Dry Powder Fire Extinguishing Systems](#)
- [MGN 367 – Guidelines for the Approval of Fixed Fire Detection and Alarm Systems for Cabin Balconies](#)
- [MGN 382 – Fire Protection of Balconies and Other External Areas on Passenger Ships](#)
- [MGN 389 – Operating Instructions and Signage for Fixed Gas Fire-Extinguishing Systems](#)
- [MGN 406 – Use of Barbecues and Pig Roasts on Ships and Fishing Vessels](#)
- [MGN 550 – Amendment 1: Guidance on Electrical Installations for Lithium-Ion Batteries](#)
- [MGN 580 – Amendment 1: Fire Retardant Treatments for Fabrics \(Large Commercial Yacht Code\)](#)
- [MGN 667 – Guidance for MSN 1900 \(and separately for MSN 1901/1902\)](#)
- [MGN 681 – Fire Safety and Storage of Small Electric-Powered Craft on Yachts](#)

4. Life-Saving Appliances and Arrangements

- [MSN 1757 – Life Saving Appliances for Ships of Classes III to VI\(A\)](#)
- [MGN 83 – Guidelines and Specification for Hyperbaric Evacuation Systems](#)
- [MGN 343 – Hydrostatic Release Units \(HRU\) and Float Free Arrangements for Inflatable Liferafts](#)
- [MGN 396 – Compatibility of Life-Saving Equipment](#)

- [MGN 464 – Lifeboats and Rescue Boats – Addressing Weight Increase Due to Water Ingress](#)
- [MGN 519 – Controlled Means of Descent at Embarkation Stations \(Replacement for Ladders\)](#)
- [MGN 524 – Amendment 1: Category C Medical Kits for Life-Saving Appliances](#)
- [MGN 529 – Acceptance Criteria for Airtight Packaging of Immersion Suits](#)
- [MGN 541 – Evaluation and Replacement of Lifeboat Release and Retrieval Systems](#)
- [MGN 544 – Recovery Equipment for Persons from the Water: Plans, Procedures, and Acceptance](#)
- [MGN 548 – Amendment 1: Servicing Requirements for SOLAS Inflatable Life-Saving Appliances](#)
- [MGN 560 – Amendment 2: Requirements for Life-Saving Appliances](#)
- [MGN 567 – Marine Evacuation Systems, Survival Craft, and Launching Appliances – Risk Mitigation](#)
- [MGN 643 – Emergency Information and Arrangements for Passengers on Passenger Ships \(Classes III, IV, V, VI and VI\(A\)\)](#)
- [MGN 555 – Amendment 1: Authorisation of Service Providers for Life-Saving Appliances](#)
- [MGN 558 – Amendment 1: Servicing and Deployment of Marine Evacuation Systems](#)

5. Radiocommunications

- [MSN 1690 – Amendment 1: Radio Equipment – Serviceability and Maintenance](#)
- [MSN 1903 – Global Maritime Distress and Safety System \(GMDSS\) Ship Requirements](#)
- [MGN 417 – Amendment 1: GMDSS Shore-Based Maintenance for Radio Communications](#)
- [MGN 530 – Radio Log Book for Merchant Shipping and Fishing Vessels](#)
- [MGN 562 – Amendment 4: Amendments to Radio Regulations and GMDSS Equipment Updates](#)
- [MGN 641 – Amendment 1: Guidance on Radiocommunications under SOLAS Chapter IV](#)

6. Carriage of Cargoes

- [MSN 1231 – Safe Cargo Handling Operations on Offshore Supply Vessels](#)
- [MSN 1917 – Carriage of Cargoes: Requirements for the Safe Use of Pesticides in Ships](#)
- [MGN 60 – Code of Safe Practice for Solid Bulk Cargoes \(BC Code\) – Carriage of Coal Cargoes](#)
- [MGN 198 – Safety at Solid Bulk Cargo Terminals](#)

- [MGN 223 – Carriage of Coconut Oil and Other Vegetable Oils in Tanks](#)
- [MGN 511 – Solid Bulk Cargoes – Adoption of Amendment 02-13 to the IMSBC Code](#)
- [MGN 512 – Guidelines for Reporting Cargo Properties Not Listed in the IMSBC Code](#)
- [MGN 513 – Guidelines for Sampling, Testing, and Controlling Moisture Content in Cargoes That May Liquefy](#)
- [MGN 531 – Cargo Stowage and Securing \(CSS Code\) – Guidance for Existing Containerships](#)
- [MGN 534 – Guidance on Verifying the Gross Mass of Packed Containers](#)
- [MGN 552 – Safe Stowage of Specialised Vehicles](#)
- [MGN 621 – Guidance on Stowage and Securing of Vehicles on Roll-on/Roll-off Ships](#)
- [MGN 653 – Amendment 1: Electric Vehicles Onboard Passenger Roll-on/Roll-off Ferries](#)
- [MGN 699 – Guidance on the Merchant Shipping \(Carriage of Cargoes\) Regulations 2024](#)
- [MGN 700 – Guidance on the Safe Use of Pesticides in Ships](#)

7. Carriage of Dangerous Goods

- [MSN 1852 – IMO Tanks, Portable Tanks, Road Tank Vehicles and Rail Tank Wagons for the Carriage of Dangerous Goods](#)
- [MSN 1914 – Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants: Amendments to International Standards](#)
- [MGN 36 – Document of Compliance for Ships Carrying Packaged or Dry Bulk Dangerous Goods](#)
- [MGN 37 – The Merchant Shipping \(Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants\) Regulations 1997](#)
- [MGN 282 – Guidance for the Carriage of Packaged Dangerous Goods on Offshore Supply Vessels](#)
- [MGN 283 – Guidance on Back Loading of Contaminated Bulk Liquids from Offshore Installations](#)
- [MGN 340 – International Maritime Dangerous Goods \(IMDG\) Code and Cargo Transport Unit Requirements](#)
- [MGN 497 – Storage and Use of Dangerous Goods \(Including Chemicals\) On Board Ship](#)
- [MGN 698 – The Carriage of Military and Commercial Explosives](#)

8. Special Topics

- [MGN 679 – Nuclear Ships](#)
- [MGN 327 – Research Project 502: High Speed Craft Dynamic Stability \(Design Guidance\)](#)

- [MGN 328 – Research Project 502: High Speed Craft Dynamic Stability \(Operational Guidance\)](#)
- [MGN 677 – Guidance on the Merchant Shipping \(High Speed Craft\) Regulations 2022](#)
- [MSN 1899 – Vessel Traffic Monitoring Notification and Reporting Requirements for Ships and Ports](#)
- [MGN 660 – Special Measures to Enhance Maritime Safety for Merchant Ships](#)
- [MGN 668 – Amendment 1: Additional Safety Measures for Bulk Carriers](#)
- [MGN 637 – International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters \(Polar Code\)](#)

9. Management, Certification, and Safety Verification

- [MSN 1409 – Emergency Information for Passengers](#)
- [MSN 1613 – Merchant Shipping \(Survey and Certification\) Regulations 1995 \(Arbitration Procedure\)](#)
- [MSN 1616 – Ship Inspection and Survey Organisations \(Amendment 4\)](#)
- [MSN 1751 – Amendment 1: Harmonised System of Survey and Certification \(HSSC\)](#)
- [MGN 171 – Mandatory Surveys for Ro-Ro and High Speed Craft](#)
- [MGN 634 – Navigation: Long-Range Identification and Tracking – Survey, Certification and Compliance](#)
- [MGN 635 – Inspections of Ro-Ro Passenger Ships and High-Speed Passenger Craft](#)
- [MGN 664 – Amendment 1: Certification Process for Vessels Using Innovative Technology](#)
- [MGN 690 – Approval and Acceptance of Electronic Record Books and Recording Requirements under SOLAS Chapter V/Regulation 28](#)
- [MGN 696 – Navigation Safety for Dynamically Positioned Vessels Undertaking Diving or Other Subsea Operations](#)