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Marine Circular No. 12/2025

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

Summary

1. This Notice advises on updates to the implementation of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea Convention as amended (**SOLAS Convention**) and the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea as amended (**COLREG**) upon the entry into effect of the following regulations and amendments:
 - Merchant Shipping (Safety of Life at Sea) Regulations 2025 (SI No 73 of 2025).
 - Merchant Shipping (Safety of Navigation) Regulations 2025(SI No 74 of 2025).
 - Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Cargo Ships) Regulations 2025 (SI No. 70 of 2025).
 - Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Small Commercial Vessels)(Amendment) Regulations 2025 (SI No 71 of 2025).
 - Merchant Shipping (Safety of Commercial Sailing and Motor Vessels)(Amendment) Regulations 2025 (SI No 72 of 2025).
2. This Notice should be read together with Marine Circular No 13 of 2025 which lists the adopted UK merchant shipping notices that provide guidance on the interpretation and implementation of the SOLAS Convention and the Merchant Shipping (Safety of Life at Sea) Regulations 2025.

SOLAS AND COLREG

1. The Merchant Shipping (Safety of Life at Sea) Regulations 2025 (SOLAS Regulations) and Merchant Shipping (Safety of Navigation) Regulations 2025 (Navigation Safety Regulations), Merchant Shipping (Safety of Commercial Sailing and Motor Vessels)(Amendment) Regulations 2025, Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Small Commercial Vessels)(Amendment) Regulations 2025 and Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Cargo Ships) Regulations 2025 entered into effect on 16 September 2025.
2. The SOLAS Convention 1974 was extended to the Virgin Islands on 10 June 2004 and COLREG was extended on 15 July 1977. Both conventions have been implemented in the Virgin Islands by the Merchant Shipping Act 2001, the adoption of United Kingdom legislation and a number of Virgin Island Regulations providing for the implementation of regional codes of practice.
3. The package of Regulations referred to in this Notice now provides for the implementation of the SOLAS Convention and COLREG directly in Virgin Islands' legislation.
4. The SOLAS Regulations and Navigation Safety Regulations give effect to the SOLAS Convention, and its Codes of Practice and COLREG (including all amendments agreed to those Conventions) as at the date the Regulations come into force.
5. The Merchant Shipping (Safety of Commercial Sailing and Motor Vessels)(Amendment) Regulations 2025, Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Small Commercial Vessels)(Amendment) Regulations 2025 and Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Cargo Ships) Regulations 2025 update implementation in the Virgin Islands of a number of Caribbean Codes that make equivalent provision to that found in SOLAS for commercial ships sailing within the Caribbean Trading Area.

THE SOLAS REGULATIONS

6. The SOLAS Regulations make provision as follows:
 - Part 1 **Preliminary:** establishes definitions and the relevant dates of construction for application of the regulations.
 - Part 2 **Implementation of the SOLAS Convention and Codes:** implements the Convention and Codes thereunder, makes provision for ambulatory referencing so that the regulations always refer to the most up to date version of the Convention, describes.

- Part 3 **General Application and General Provision** identifies ships to which the regulations are applicable, establishes the power of the Minister to issue notices in respect of the Convention or Regulations, the Authority to approve equipment, in accordance with the Convention, placed on board VI flagged ships, and accepting the equipment approved by other Administrations; to appoint surveyors and Recognised Organisations; the Minister's power to grant exemptions and equivalents.
- Part 4 **Construction of Ships: Structure, subdivision and Stability, Machinery and Electrical Installations:** provides for implementation of SOLAS Chapter II-Part 1. It establishes power to select rules from one of five recognised organisations, in respect of the structure, mechanical, and electrical requirements for ships.
- Part 5 **Construction of Ships: Fire Protection, Fire Detection and Fire Extinction** imposes requirements for ships to comply with Chapter II-2 of the Convention, requires ships to have fire control plans, establishes the Administration's power to approve alternative designs.
- Part 6 **Life Saving Appliances and Arrangements** establishes the application of Chapter 3 of the Convention to VI ships; the power of the Authority to approve lifesaving appliances, and requirements for approval, requires all emergency instructions to be in English, obligates that musters and drills onboard the vessel are logged; specifies the life-saving equipment on ships between 300GT to 500GT; and power to exempt ships from Chapter 3.
- Part 7 **Radiocommunications** applies Chapter IV of the Convention. Requires ships to comply to Chapter IV of the Convention; establishes the duty to maintain radiocommunication equipment; establishes the Government's responsibilities under the Convention to provide radiocommunication services and Global maritime distress and safety system identities; duty of the Administration to provide an annual report on any exemptions granted.
- Part 8 **Carriage of Cargoes and Dangerous Goods:** establishes the requirements that shippers handling cargo with particular hazards; requires ships to carry appropriate documentation.
- Part 9 **Carriage of Dangerous Goods:** requires that conventions ships comply with SOLAS Chapter VII; makes provision for the carriage of dangerous goods in packaged form and in bulk; obligates the Authority to publish detailed instructions on emergency response and first aid on its website;

requirements for the construction of chemical tankers, gas carriers, and ships carrying irradiated nuclear fuel.

- Part 10 **Nuclear Ships:** implements Chapter VIII regulating ships with nuclear reactors; requires nuclear ships to submit safety assessments to the Authority for approval and provided to States in advance of arrival; maintenance of an operating manual; immediate notification of the relevant Administration of an accident likely to lead to an environmental hazard.
- Part 11 **Management for the Safe Operation of Ships:** implements SOLAS Chapter IX; applies the International Safety Management Code to ships, and offshore drilling platforms.
- Part 12 **Safety Measures for High-Speed Craft:** implements SOLAS Chapter X; defines high-speed craft; applies the requirements of the High-Speed Craft Code.
- Part 13 **Special Measures to Enhance Maritime Safety:** implements SOLAS Chapter XI-1; makes provision for the assignment of ship identification numbers; and ships taking continuous synopsis record; requirement for installation of atmosphere testing instruments on ships.
- Part 14 **Additional Safety Measures for Bulk Carriers:** applies SOLAS Chapter XII to bulk carriers;
- Part 15 **Verification of Compliance:** implements SOLAS Chapter XIII; provides for application of III Code;
- Part 16 **Safety Measures for Ships Operating in Polar Waters:** applies SOLAS Chapter XIV; implements regulations for ships operating in Polar Water; provides for application of the Polar Code and granting of Polar Ship Certificate;
- Part 17 **Survey and Certification:** provides for survey and certification of ships for each chapter;
- Part 18 **Enforcement:** provides for inspection and control of ships; powers of detention, right to arbitration and compensation if unduly detained; provides for Offences; summary conviction no more than \$15,000; indictment 2 years prison; offences in respect of false convention documents punishable on summary conviction with a fine of max. \$25,000; or imprisonment of 2 years;

Part 19 **Transitional Provisions:** provides for certificates issued prior to the Regulations to continue to have effect.

7. The SOLAS Regulations 2025 revoke and replace the Merchant Shipping (International Safety Management Code) Regulations 2020 (SI No. 4 of 2004).
8. The Merchant Shipping (ISPS Code) Regulations 2004 (SI No 42 of 2004) remain in effect.

SAFETY OF NAVIGATION REGULATIONS 2025

9. The Safety of Navigation Regulations make provision as follows:

Part 2 **Safety of Navigation:** applies Chapter V of the SOLAS Convention. Requires ships to comply with Chapter V regulations; establishes owner/operator duties to implement and maintain various safety systems, designs and equipment; establishes the Government's responsibilities under the Convention to provide navigational warnings, lifesaving signals, hydrographic services, ships routeing, ship reporting systems, aids to navigation, meteorological services and warnings, and search and rescue services; duty of the Authority to provide an annual report on any exemptions or equivalentents granted; and prohibits misuse of distress signals.

Part 3 **Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions** gives full effect to COLREG and require masters of ship to comply with the obligations imposed by COLREG in relation to the prevention of collisions and use of distress signals.

Part 4 **General Provisions** provides that contravention of the regulations may incur on summary conviction a fine up to \$25,000 or on indictment a fine up to \$100,000 or 2 years imprisonment or both;

UPDATED CARIBBEAN REGULATIONS

10. The following Regulations which provide for application of SOLAS in relation to regionally operated vessels also enter into effect:

11. Merchant Shipping (Safety of Commercial Sailing and Motor Vessels) (Amendment) Regulations 2025

- a. update the safety codes applied to vessels in commercial use for sport or pleasure, which do not carry cargo, or more than 12 passengers;

- b. replace the Code of Safety for Small Commercial Sailing Vessels – a Code of Practice” with “[The Small Commercial Vessel and Pilot Boat Code of Practice](#);¹
- c. replace “The Code of Practice for Safety of Large Commercial Sailing and Motor Vessels” with The Large Commercial Yacht Code - (1) [Part A Large Yacht Code](#) (up to 12 passengers); (2) [Part B Passenger Yacht Code](#) (up to 36 passengers) and (3) [Common Annexes](#).

12. The Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Small Commercial Vessels)(Amendment) Regulations 2025

- a. implement the [Code of Safety for Small Commercial Vessels Operating in the Caribbean Sea](#) prepared by the IMO for Caribbean Countries.
- b. update definition of ‘small commercial vessel’ and the required ‘hours of rest’ in accordance with the most recent version of the Code.

13. Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Cargo Ships) Regulations 2025

- a. revoke the previous Merchant Shipping (Caribbean Cargo Ships) Regulations 2004;
- b. apply the most recent version of the [Code of Safety for Caribbean Cargo Ships](#), adopted by the Final Preparatory and Signatory Meeting on Port State Control for the Caribbean Region on February 9th, 1996, which agrees the minimum standards for cargo vessels operating in the Caribbean region;
- c. provide for survey and certification, dry dock inspection, fires safety, life saving, radio communications and navigation equipment; duty to report accidents; suspension of certificates; and enforcement under the Act.

PUBLICATION OF THE REGULATIONS

14. Copies of the Regulations may be accessed at:

- At VISMA website: <https://www.bvimaritime.vg>
- At Virgin Islands Statutes online: <https://laws.gov.vg/>

¹ MGN 280 (M)

PUBLICATION OF CONVENTIONS

15. The SOLAS Convention and COLREG have been given force of law in the Virgin Islands.
16. The SOLAS Regulations must be read in conjunction with the SOLAS Convention.
17. Hard copy of the Conventions may be obtained from the IMO, 4 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7SR or through [IMO Publications website](#);
18. Digital copy of the Conventions may be accessed on the [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office \(FCDO\) treaties database](#); or through [IMO Publications website](#).

AMENDMENTS TO THE CONVENTIONS

19. The Minister shall as soon as reasonably practicable notify the House of Assembly of any modification or replacement of the Conventions and publish details of the modification or replacement with an explanation of their effect.

CONTACT DETAILS

20. 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