



Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Look-out During Periods of Darkness and Restricted Visibility

Note to shipowners, operators, masters, skippers, deck officers and crews of all UK ships anywhere, and other ships operating in UK waters.

This Note should be read in conjunction with Merchant Shipping Notice MSN 1682(M) or any subsequent amendment

Summary

This Note is a reminder to all UK ships wherever they may be and other ships operating in UK territorial waters, of the legal requirements for keeping a proper look-out, especially during the hours of darkness.

1. Following a recent serious casualty in UK territorial waters involving a container ship, which resulted in the loss of the vessel and her cargo as well as oil pollution, the MCA reminds operators and masters that all UK ships, wherever they may be, and other ships in UK territorial waters, are strongly advised not to operate with the officer of the navigational watch acting as the sole look-out during periods of darkness. An additional look-out should also be posted at any other time during restricted visibility or when the prevailing circumstances indicate such action is in the interests of safety.
2. All UK ships wherever they may be, and other ships in UK waters, are required under the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996 to maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions, so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision. The owner, master and any person for the time being responsible for the conduct of the ship, is liable to prosecution in the event of a contravention.
3. Failure to maintain a proper look-out may also endanger the ship or persons, and render the master or responsible officer liable to prosecution under section 58 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995. A 12 month custodial sentence was recently imposed on the Chief Mate of a cargo ship, in that he failed to maintain a safe navigational watch as a result of drunkenness and disabling the watch alarm system. The vessel had run aground resulting in £100,000 worth of damage.
4. Masters of UK ships and other ships when in UK waters (other than fishing vessels and pleasure craft) are also reminded of the requirements in the Merchant Shipping (Safe Manning, Hours of Work and Watchkeeping) Regulations 1997. These requirements are to ensure that the watchkeeping arrangements for the ship are at all times adequate for

maintaining safe navigational watches, having regard to the STCW Code section A-VIII, and to give directions to deck watchkeeping officers in accordance with Part 3 of that section. Having regard to STCW 95, masters ought not to operate with the officer

of the navigational watch acting as sole lookout during periods of darkness and restricted visibility. Depending on the circumstances, such operation may run a serious risk of rendering the owner and master liable to prosecution under the 1997 Regulations.

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May 2000

MC 34/30/010



*An executive agency of the Department of the
Environment, Transport and the Regions*