



Maritime and Coastguard Agency

---

---

## Helicopter Assistance at Sea

**Notice to all Shipowners, Masters, Officers, Ratings, Shipbuilders and Shiprepairers**

*This notice replaces MSN 1506..*

---

---

### Summary

This Notice gives advice on the provision of facilities for emergency helicopter operations on all types of sea-going ships which do not have a helideck, and the contingency plans which should be made and the drills which should be undertaken in anticipation of the need for helicopter assistance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Guidance on the conduct of emergency helicopter operations will be found in Notice No. 4, paragraphs 56 to 68 of the Annual Summary of Admiralty Notices to Mariners, and in the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual Vol II Chapter 6.7 and Vol III Section 2-18. Guidance on the provision of permanent winching and landing areas will be found in the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) "Guide to Helicopter/Ship Operations" (Third Edition 1989). These publications should be read in conjunction with the advice contained in this Notice.

1.2 The success of low hover operations depends on the behaviour of the ship. If any movement is taking place, a low hover may be impracticable and may be dangerous. The decision on whether to use this technique will be made by the helicopter captain.

## 2. GENERAL

2.1 The use of helicopters has become commonplace to evacuate a limited number of persons from ships following a casualty, for rendering medical assistance, and for landing specialist personnel for fire-fighting, damage control and salvage purposes. Provision should be made on board ship for such eventualities. Such provision includes the selection of an area or areas over which a helicopter can safely operate, the preparation of contingency plans for helicopter operations, and the carrying out of drills. This is particularly important in the case of passenger ships which operate within helicopter coverage of the nearest coast.

2.2 Most helicopter operations are successfully executed due primarily to the skill of helicopter crews. These operations are often hazardous and their success can be better assured if owners, masters and officers make suitable provision and preparations.

2.3 Accidents have occurred in the past due to downdraft from the helicopter. All loose objects, such as ropes, tarpaulins, buoyant apparatus and headgear and garbage, located within and adjacent to the intended helicopter operating area, should be either secured or removed.

### 3. **WINCHING AND LOW HOVER AREAS**

3.1 It is recommended that a dedicated **winching area** as described in the IAMSAR Manual be provided on:

3.1.1 all new sea-going ships of 100 metres in length and over; and

3.2.2 where practicable, on all other sea-going ships of 100 metres in length and over.

3.2 It is recommended that, where practicable, a clear **low hover area** large enough for a helicopter to conduct a low hover operation is provided on passenger ships. A low hover area will permit passengers and crew to board a helicopter directly from the deck thereby significantly reducing the time needed to board the helicopter. Where it is only practicable to make provision for winching it is recommended that a winching area be provided at each end of a passenger ship where this is at all possible.

### 4. **CONTINGENCY PLANS, DRILLS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

4.1 Contingency plans and check lists should be prepared and periodic drills carried out. An example of a shipboard safety check list from the ICS publication "Guide to Helicopter/Ship Operations" is at Annex 1.

4.2 It is possible to communicate with the helicopter on Channel 16 VHF as it is approaching a ship. Communications will be difficult when the helicopter is overhead due to engine noise unless the ship's VHF equipment is fitted with headphones or other suitable devices for use in high ambient noise conditions. Communications will be possible if a winchman is lowered onto the ship.

## More Information

SAR Branch  
Maritime and Coastguard Agency  
Bay 1/08  
Spring Place  
105 Commercial Road  
Southampton  
SO15 1EG

Tel : +44 (0) 23 8032 9261  
Fax : +44 (0) 23 8032 9488  
e-mail: SAR.Response@mcga.gov.uk

General Inquiries: 24 Hour Infoline  
[infoline@mcga.gov.uk](mailto:infoline@mcga.gov.uk)  
0870 600 6505

MCA Website Address: [www.mcga.gov.uk](http://www.mcga.gov.uk)

File Ref: CG 23/3/3

Published: October 2006

© Crown Copyright 2006

**Safer Lives, Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas**

*Printed on material containing minimum 75% post-consumer waste paper*

*An executive agency of the*  
*Department for*  
**Transport**

**SHIPBOARD SAFETY CHECK LIST**

Printed by HMSO, Edinburgh PressDd 8114144 9,150 11/92 (205771)

To be checked by the officer in charge.

**1. GENERAL**

- (a) Have all loose objects within and adjacent to the operating area been secured or removed
- (b) Have all aerials, standing or running gear above and in the vicinity of the operating area been lowered or secured?
- (c) Has a pennant or windsock been hoisted where it can be clearly seen by the helicopter pilot?
- (d) Has the officer of the watch been consulted about the ship's readiness?
- (e) Does the leader of the deck party have a portable radio transceiver (walkie talkie) for communicating with the bridge?
- (f) Are the fire pumps running and is there adequate pressure on deck?
- (g) Are fire hoses ready (hoses should be near to but clear of the operating area)?
- (h) Are foam hoses, monitors and portable foam equipment ready?
- (i) Are dry powder fire extinguishers available and ready for use?
- (j) Is the deck party complete, correctly dressed and in position?
- (k) Are the fire hoses and foam nozzles pointing away from the operating area in case of inadvertent discharge?
- (l) Has a rescue party been detailed?
- (m) Is a man overboard rescue boat ready for lowering?
- (n) Are the following items of equipment to hand?
  - (i) Large axe
  - (ii) Crowbar
  - (iii) Wire cutters
  - (iv) Red emergency signal/tor n
  - (v) Marshalling batons (at night)
  - (vi) First aid equipment
- (o) Has the correct lighting (including special navigation lights) been switched on prior to night operations?
- (p) Is the deck party ready, wearing brightly coloured tabards (waistcoats) and protective helmets, and are all passengers clear of the operating area?
- (q) Has the hook handler been equipped with helmet, strong rubber gloves and rubber soled shoes to avoid the danger of static discharge?
- (r) Is access to and egress from the operating area clear?

## **2. LANDING ON**

- (a) Is the deck party aware that a landing is to be made?
- (b) Is the operating area free of heavy spray or seas on deck?
- (c) Have side rails and, where necessary, awnings, stanchions and other obstructions been lowered or removed?
- (d) Where applicable, have portable pipes been removed and have the remaining apex ends been blanked off?
- (e) Are rope messengers to hand for securing the helicopter, if necessary? (Note: only the helicopter pilot may decide whether or not to secure the helicopter.)
- (f) Have all personnel been warned to keep clear of rotors and exhausts?

## **3. TANKERS: Additional Items for Check List**

- a) Ships not fitted with an inert gas system: has pressure been released from tanks within 30 minutes of commencement of helicopter operations?
- (b) Ships fitted with an inert gas system: has pressure in cargo tanks been reduced to slight positive pressure?
- (c) All tankers: have all tank openings been secured following venting operations?

## **4. BULK CARRIERS AND COMBINATION CARRIERS: Additional Item for Check List**

Has surface ventilation to dry bulk cargoes ceased, and have all hatch openings been fully battened down prior to helicopter operations?

## **5. GAS CARRIERS: Additional Item for Check List**

Have all precautions been taken to prevent vapour emission on deck?