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GUIDANCE FOR CENTRAL ALERTING POSTS (CAPs)

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its seventy-second session (17 to 26 May 2000), recognizing the need for interim measures for Heads of MRCCs to carry out an efficient co-operation in SAR matters for a transitional period until the global SAR plan had been fully implemented, approved the annexed Guidance on Central Alerting Posts (CAPs).

2 Member Governments are invited to use the annexed Guidance, as appropriate, and bring it to the attention of all parties concerned.

ANNEX

GUIDANCE ON CENTRAL ALERTING POSTS (CAPs)

INTRODUCTION

Certain States have ratified the 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR Convention). Others have not. However, more general obligations in matter of SAR may be found in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and in the International Convention on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974, as amended (see Appendix A).

Furthermore, even if some States have ratified none of these Conventions, as Search and Rescue is an action to save human life, not a legal institution, there is a general obligation for every State to participate, among its possibilities, in the global SAR effort. But to be efficient, this participation must respect certain standards of the global SAR organization, particularly when co-operating with other States.

The Alerting Post

According to the SAR Convention principles (see Appendix B) some volunteer States are only responsible for a Search and rescue Region (SRR).

It follows that some SRRs include coasts and territorial sea of States different from the one that is responsible for this SRR and which hence operates the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) of this SRR. In most cases, exchanges of information between the MRCC and this (these) foreign State(s) pass always through the same local body: police headquarters or harbourmaster, for example. This body so operates as *alerting post* of a special kind as it is the sole correspondent of the MRCC in this foreign country.

Definition of the *alerting post* may be found in the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual: "Any facility intended to serve as an intermediary between a person reporting an emergency and a rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre". A lot of them carry out this function very occasionally. Some others are more sea-oriented. But in general, modes of co-operation between the alerting posts are entirely in the hands of the MRCC which has to give to any person or body, which may become occasionally an alerting post, some instructions such as phone numbers to call and list of data to gather in case of alert. The situation of alerting posts described in the previous indent is a bit different as having a more important general responsibility for SAR in their country. These have been given the name of "Central Alerting Post" (CAP).

Purpose of the circular

The purpose of this circular about CAPs is:

- to give guidance to the competent body of the Governments involved, even if this State has not ratified the SAR Convention, because while ratification is strongly recommended, as far as human life is involved, a co-operation without ratification is far better than no co-operation at all;
- to give basic elements to the CAPs for them to carry out an efficient co-operation in SAR matters; and
- to give guidance to the MRCCs involved, for them to advise properly the CAPs in their SRRs.

General remarks

- This circular deals normally only with the maritime SAR organization. However, principles are the same in both organizations and these are joint in certain States.
- It must be stressed that, if States involved organize their co-operation by signing an agreement or arrangement, they may adopt in this latter instrument other solutions than those provided in the present circular, as far as provisions jointly adopted respect SAR Convention principles and provisions.
- MRSC (Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre) can be read in place of the MRCC when a MRSC exists and has been instructed to have link with a CAP.

Attachment A provides pertinent quotations of the UNCLOS and SOLAS Convention.

Attachment B recalls the basic elements of the global SAR organization.

1 DEFINITION

*A Central Alerting Post (CAP) in a given country** is the sole point of contact for SAR matters between all authorities and SAR facilities of this country and the foreign MRCC of the Search and Rescue Region (SRR) in which the country of the CAP is included.

In most cases the duties of CAP will be a part-time activity of a public body (police or coastguard headquarters or station, harbourmaster, etc.). But it may be carried out by a private body if instructed to do so by a governmental authority.

A CAP should be permanently manned at least by the way of a duty officer able to be called at home out of working hours.

2 DUTIES OF A CAP

2.1 Permanent preparatory duties

2.1.1 Regarding the other alerting posts of the country

A CAP should be given task to centralize information about any maritime incident.

It should insure its role of centralisation is clearly known, at least by other public bodies involved in emergency situations and in maritime activities.

* This "country" may be either an independent State or a remote part of another State whose main coasts are included in another (or several other) SRR(s).

2.1.2 Regarding the SAR resources of the country

The CAP should keep a record of any facility able to intervene in a SAR case, with basic data (type, range, speed etc.), status of availability, as far as possible, and especially a way of alerting it for intervention.

2.1.3 Regarding the MRCC

The CAP should keep and take into account any information and guidelines received from MRCC.

If there is not a sole phone number to be used out of working hours, it has to send to MRCC a list of duty officers' personal phone numbers.

2.2 Duties about a given SAR case

2.2.1 Normal situation

As soon as a SAR alert is received by the CAP, this body has:

- to pass this alert to the MRCC with full gathered data about the incident;
- if necessary, to receive a request from the MRCC for gathering more information;
- to receive a request from the MRCC for operating local SAR facilities, following assessment of the situation by the MRCC;
- to pass immediately this request to the body which has power to operate these facilities with all useful information about the task: object of the task, area, radio frequencies etc..;
- if the facilities have not direct communications link with the MRCC (a direct link is the normal way, which has to be sought), to act as communications relay between these facilities and the MRCC;
- to report any new element to the MRCC; and
- if necessary (for serious accidents for example), to act as communications relay between the MRCC and any governmental or public authority involved in the State of the CAP.

2.2.2 Special situation

When according to information received by the CAP:

- a SAR case clearly needs no search action but only a rescue intervention for few people at a precise point;
- this point is in the territorial sea of the CAP's State;
- the rescue intervention may be carried out by local facilities without help coming from another country or from ships at sea; and
- the CAP may request immediate intervention of local facilities while informing the MRCC.

It has to be stressed that the three above conditions have to be respected because:

- as soon as there is a search to carry out, it may be a long and difficult operation involving facilities coming from outside; and
- a CAP has no power to co-ordinate foreign facilities and vessels at sea.

3 DUTIES OF A MRCC REGARDING A CAP

3.1 Permanent preparatory duties

The MRCC permanently has to:

- give the CAP any useful indications for organizing their co-operation, keeping in mind that this information must be kept very simple, as a CAP is only a part-time non-specialized (and sometimes non-maritime) SAR actor;
- update all elements regarding transmission of alerts (phone or fax numbers, etc.);
- advise the CAP as appropriate; and
- propose its participation in the training of staff manning the CAP, if practical.

3.2 Duties during a SAR operation

The MRCC has to keep the CAP informed of the latest information about the operation.

4 EQUIPMENT OF A CAP

A phone line and a fax line are sufficient as recommended basic equipment. According to a local situation, VHF equipment may be considered.

5 DOCUMENTATION OF A CAP

5.1 IMO documentation

This circular may be the sufficient IMO documentation for a CAP. However, it may be useful for the latter to have a copy of the IAMSAR Manual.

5.2 MRCC documentation

The CAP has to keep and update documentation sent by the MRCC regarding their mutual co-operation.

5.3 Domestic documentation

The CAP has to maintain and update any documentation issued by any competent authority, especially instructions regarding ways of alerting local facilities.

6 SAR FACILITIES

According to IMO definitions:

- a SAR facility is “any mobile resource, including designated search and rescue units, used to conduct search and rescue operations”; and
- a SAR unit is “a unit composed of trained personnel and provided with equipment suitable for the expeditious conduct of search and rescue operations”.

In many countries there are no dedicated SAR units, except small craft. Practically, the SAR resources that a CAP may call for intervention would be in most cases provided by patrol craft of the Navy or the Police or the Coast Guard and by aircraft of these bodies, if any. However, any other solution is acceptable, if efficient.

7 FURTHER EVOLUTION

An advanced evolution of a CAP may be transformed into a Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre (MRSC). Such a transformation is subject to the following conditions:

- a certain number of SAR cases to be treated;
- the ratification of the SAR Convention by the CAP's State;
- a joint wish of the authority of the MRCC and of the authority of the CAP;
- a more important level of equipment, especially communications equipment (see IMO document COMSAR/Circ.18, Guidance on minimum communication needs of MRCCs);
- a more important documentation (see IMO document SAR.7/Circ.2);
- a level of training of personnel similar to the MRCC training level; and
- a jointly decided delegation given by the MRCC to the new MRSC.

Appendix A

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Article 98, paragraph 2:

“Every coastal State shall promote the establishment, operation and maintenance of an adequate and effective search and rescue service regarding safety on and over the sea and, when circumstances so require, by way of mutual regional arrangements co-operate with neighbouring States for this purpose.”

The International Convention on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974, as amended, regulation V/15

- “(a) Each contracting Government undertakes to ensure that any necessary arrangements are made for coast watching and the rescue of persons in distress at sea round its coasts. These arrangements should include the establishment, operation and maintenance of such maritime safety facilities as are deemed practicable and necessary having regard to the density of the seagoing traffic and the navigational dangers and should, so far as possible, afford adequate means of locating and rescuing such persons.
- (b) Each contracting Government undertakes to make available information concerning its existing rescue facilities and the plans for changes therein, if any.”

Appendix B

BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE GLOBAL SAR ORGANIZATION

1 International instruments

Two international conventions give the framework of the global Search and Rescue organization in the world:

- the International Civil Aviation Convention (Chicago, 1944) and especially its Annex XII about SAR (1952) for aircraft accidents over land and sea; and
- the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (Hamburg, 1979), as amended, for any "person in distress at sea".

2 Principles of the SAR organization

1st principle: the seas of the world are divided in "Search and Rescue Regions" (SRR). One volunteer State is responsible for this SRR which may include coast and territorial seas of other States, as far as they have accepted it. There is a strong need to avoid confusion in substance between boundaries of these SRRs (which are purely technical in the aim of rescue human life) and political and legal jurisdiction boundaries at sea.

2nd principle: the obligations of the responsible State are not to provide SAR facilities to intervene in any circumstance in any part of the SRR. These obligations are to operate permanently a Rescue Co-ordination Centre (RCC) (and associated technical equipment as appropriate) in charge of reception and centralisation of all alerts in the SRR and then to co-ordinate SAR operations;

3rd principle: any State (hence including States not responsible of a SRR and even States that have not ratified the SAR Convention) has the obligation to participate in the SAR effort, according to its situation regarding length of coasts, maritime activities, etc;

4th principle: operations co-ordinated by MRCCs are carried out by SAR units of its own State, SAR units of any other State able to participate and any ship at sea, which has a legal obligation to participate;

5th principle: States have the obligation to co-operate, particularly by providing SAR resources even when the operation is not co-ordinated by their own MRCC, as soon as it is technically possible; and

6th principle: any expense in SAR operations are sustained by the operator of the facility (government for public vessel and aircraft, shipowner for trade and fishing vessel, pleasure craft operator).