
4 ALBERT EMBANKMENT
LONDON SE1 7SR
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7735 7611 Fax: +44 (0)20 7587 3210

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GUIDANCE ON SMARTPHONE AND OTHER COMPUTER DEVICE SAR APPLICATIONS

1 The Sub-Committee on Radiocommunications and Search and Rescue (COMSAR), at its sixteenth session (12 to 16 March 2012), was advised that applications for "Smartphones" and other computer devices have been developed and are available for download that relate to Search and Rescue (SAR). Such applications offer users a facility to raise a SAR alert. The Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), at its ninety-first session (26 to 30 November 2012), approved the Guidance on Smartphone and Other Computer Device SAR Applications.

2 There are potential safety concerns about the use of such applications where the application relies on e-mail as a form of notification. E-mail has not been approved as a means of distress notification to an RCC. There is no guarantee that an e-mail alert will be received by the appropriate authorities (including RCCs); as a result the application user may incorrectly rely upon the assumed reception of an e-mail by the authorities. This false assumption may put lives at risk.

3 It may be possible for such applications to be made compatible with existing global and national search and rescue arrangements but it is recommended that Member Governments review their approach to such applications. Where there is a safety concern with applications that use e-mail for distress notification it is recommended that Member Governments consider measures to discourage the use of such applications.

4 Additionally, Member Governments may want to ensure that, in markets where the application might be available outside their country, the application provider clearly lists their country as one of the locations where distress e-mail notifications will not be received by search and rescue authorities. Member Governments are advised to contact the sponsor/owner of the SAR application and request removal of their country from the application and any advertising material including websites that list regions that receive e-mail alerts.

5 It is also recommended that Member Governments review the arrangements they have with any other providers to ensure that their search and rescue operational requirements are adequately addressed. Some SAR authorities have currently limited smartphone applications to routing via phone to the closest RCC as published in the Nautical Publications, or as provided for by National SAR authorities.

6 Member Governments are requested to bring this circular to the attention of all parties concerned.