
Circular 2016/001

Electronic and digital nautical publications

Date: 23/06/2016

To whom it may concern,

Taking into consideration SOLAS regulation V/27 concerning the availability on board of adequate and up-to-date nautical publications for intended voyages, following decision has been made by the Belgian Maritime Inspectorate:

Electronic versions of nautical publications are allowed on board of ships which sail under Belgian Flag if they comply with the requirements as specified below.

However hard copies of the "International Code of Signals" and the "IAMSAR Manual Volume III" are to be available on board at all times.

1) Issuing organisation

Electronic versions of all nautical publications used should be officially issued by an administration, authorised hydrographic office or other relevant approved organization such as, but not limited to, the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO).

The distribution of these electronic versions should be performed by a distributor officially recognised by the maker of the product.

The publications should be read-only format which means that the information should be protected from editing other than an approved update.

2) Accessibility and arrangements

- The publications should be accessible using a dedicated computer for administrative purposes which is located on the bridge and which is connected to the ship's main and emergency power supplies. This unit is referred to as the primary system.
- The publications should be available on at least one other back-up computer (referred to as the secondary system) which is dedicated for administrative purposes. The secondary system should comply with one of the following requirements:
 - The secondary system should be connected to the ship's main and emergency power supplies.
 - The secondary system should be a stand-alone unit with an independent power supply (e.g. a laptop).
 - If the secondary system can only be operated on the main power supply, arrangements should be made to either replace the primary system with the secondary system immediately in case of failure of the first mentioned or to have the necessary information for the intended voyage from the electronic nautical publications available at all times as hard copy in the voyage plan. In case the latter option is used, information for the intended voyage is to be considered also in case of emergency and in case of substantial diversion of the intended route.
- A UPS cannot be considered as an emergency source of power because of the relatively short time before its batteries are exhausted. A UPS can however be used in case of fluctuations in the ship's main power supply or in the event of a complete failure of the main power supply before the emergency power supply is fully operational.
- Both the primary and secondary system should include a printer each, one of which should be a colour printer. Both printers should be able to be connected to either system immediately in case of a failure of one of the printers.

- Consideration should be given to protect the primary and secondary system against computer viruses.

3) Training

Ship's master and navigational officers are trained to use the system. The master and all officers should be able to perform an update and an installation.

4) Use and updating

Updates should be applied to both the primary and the secondary system as soon as possible. It should be possible on board to electronically receive the necessary data for the updating of the digital publications at the same interval as presently provided by means of the notices to mariners.

A procedure should be integrated into the ISM system for updating the electronic nautical publications including records of when updates are received and applied.

During the passage planning it should be checked that any licenses concerning the use of the software and its updates will remain valid for a period in excess of the expected worst-case voyage scenario unless licenses and updates can be obtained and applied immediately even when at sea.

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