

NOTICE TO MARINERS No.12 of 2011

THE DANGERS OF USING MOBILE PHONES AND LAPTOPS WHILST KEEPING A NAVIGATIONAL WATCH

In a fatal incident in the United States last year, two passengers died when a tug towing a barge alongside ran down an amphibious passenger vessel anchored in the navigational channel. The subsequent report identified a principal cause of the incident as the failure of the mate of the tug to keep a proper lookout, including monitoring the VHF radio, as he was distracted by repeated use of his mobile phone and a laptop computer.

The tidal Thames is a very busy, and at times, very congested waterway. Vessel operators and masters must make certain that appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that watchkeepers are not distracted by the use of mobile phones and other non-navigational equipment; and are therefore able to concentrate on the core task of maintaining a navigational watch, which includes keeping a proper lookout, by all available means in accordance with Rule 5 of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea.

Operators' and masters' attention is also drawn to **MGN 299 (M+F)** - Interference with Safe Navigation through Inappropriate Use of Mobile Phones (attached overleaf) issued by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency, which provides more specific guidance on these issues.

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MGN 299 (M+F)

INTERFERENCE WITH SAFE NAVIGATION THROUGH INAPPROPRIATE USE OF MOBILE PHONES

Notice to: Shipowners, Ship Operators, Charterers, Masters, Ships' Officers, Fishing and Leisure Vessel Skippers, Shipping Agents, Pilots, Port Authorities, Ship Chandlers, Tug Operators, Bunkering Providers etc

Summary

There is growing concern that the use of mobile phones at inappropriate times is distracting Bridge Management Teams from their primary duties of navigating and conning their vessel

Key Points

- Interference, in this context, relates to the distraction caused by making or receiving mobile phone calls at inappropriate times during the conduct of the vessel's navigation and conning.
- Such activity is liable to demand the attention of bridge personnel when full attention should be devoted to the safe and efficient navigation of the vessel.
- Many individuals and organisations with business with the vessel, expect an instant response to their phone calls without being aware of the demands this places on the personnel responsible for the vessel's safe navigation.
- Ship operators are recommended to have procedures in place, in the vessel's safety management system, as part of International Safety Management (ISM) Code compliance, to regulate the usage of mobile phone on ships' bridges.
- Consideration should also be given to prohibiting all mobile phone usage when navigational requirements demand the individual attention of all those responsible for the safe conduct of the vessel.

Introduction

1. Concerns have been raised with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) in recent months about the use of mobile phones aboard ships and the subsequent interference with navigation. Such interference is not related to difficulties of a technical kind but rather to the effect of mobile phones on navigation and conning of the vessel, by demanding the attention of bridge personnel, at inappropriate moments.

2. The MCA initially received anecdotal evidence via the Confidential Hazardous Information Reporting Programme (CHIRP)¹ but latterly this has been substantiated with the publication of the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) Report² into the Grounding of the “Attilio Ievoli” in the Western Solent, in June 2004.

3. The MAIB Report clearly states (Section 2.4.2) that a mobile phone was in use on the bridge for the majority of the time between the pilot disembarking and the vessel grounding. It further states that it was known that the Master made some, if not all, of the calls during this period. With the remainder of the bridge team unclear of their relative responsibilities for navigation, and the master distracted on the telephone, no one appeared to have been concentrating on the safety of the vessel.

4. On this particular subject, the Report calls for a restriction on the use of mobile phones in the approaches to a port, for both incoming and outgoing calls. This could be achieved by designating pilotage, and other restricted waters, as ‘red zones’, in which outgoing mobile telephone calls are prohibited, and incoming calls are diverted to a message service. Use of this technique, or similar control measures, ensures that mobile telephones are not a distraction for the bridge team at a time when they should be concentrating fully on the navigation of the vessel.

5. The ease of communications between ship and shore via mobile phones, in coastal and port approach areas, has resulted in excessive demands being placed, at times, on ships’ masters and officers by having to deal with enquiries from a wide range of organisations and individuals who have business with the vessel. These include, but not necessarily limited to, the shipowners and operators themselves, charterers, chandlers, port officials and shipping agents.

6. Those with business with the ship should understand that they will be attempting to contact a working environment during times when safety critical operations may be undertaken. Calls should only be made to a ship when absolutely necessary and there should be no expectation of an instant response.

7. One of the Recommendations in the MAIB Report is directed at the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) to encourage its member shipping companies to introduce a routine of limited use of mobile phones in pilotage and other restricted waters.

8. The MCA strongly endorses this Recommendation and encourages the development of a procedure to cover the use of mobile phones in such situations to be incorporated, where appropriate, into the vessel’s safety management system, as part of International Safety Management (ISM) Code compliance.

9. Additionally, consideration should be given to the prohibition of all mobile phones from the bridges of ships when navigational requirements demand the individual attention of all those responsible for the safe conduct of the vessel when navigating, for example, in:

- Areas of high traffic density,
- Conditions of restricted visibility,
- The vicinity of offshore installations and other structures, or
- The approaches to ports, harbours or anchorages.

10. In conclusion, there is a compelling need for clarity of purpose when conducting the safe navigation of a vessel which endorses the requirement for an active management policy for the use of mobile phones on the bridges of ships at all times, but especially when the navigation risks are higher.

¹ <http://www.chirp.co.uk>

² www.maib.dft.gov.uk/publications/investigation_reports/2005/Attilio_Ievoli.cfm

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Department for
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