An Roinn Iompair
Department of Transport

Marine Notice No. 77 of 2023

Notice to all Shipowners, Fishing Vessel Owners, Agents, Shipmasters, Skippers, Fishers, Yachtsmen and Seafarers

Radio Communications and Distress Alerts

The Maritime Safety Committee of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has issued several circulars in relation to compliance with Chapter IV of the Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) as follows:

1. MSC.1/Circ.1645 – Guidance for the Reception of Maritime Safety Information (MSI) and Search and Rescue (SAR) Related Information as required in the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS)

This Circular provides guidance on the recognized MSI and SAR related information broadcast services and the equipment which should be installed on board ships to meet the requirements of SOLAS Chapter IV. A copy of the guidance can be found at Appendix 1 to this Notice.

2. MSC.1/Circ.1656 – GMDSS Operating Guidance for Ships in Distress Situations

This Circular provides guidance concerning the use of appropriate radiocommunication equipment in distress situations, in accordance with Chapter IV of SOLAS. The guidance is set out in poster form in Appendix 2 to this Notice and it is recommended it be displayed on ships' bridges as an A4 size poster.

3. MSC.1/Circ.1657 – Procedure for Responding to DSC Distress Alerts by Ships

This Circular contains a procedure to be followed by radio personnel on board ships when responding to VHF, MF and HF distress alerts, in accordance with Chapter IV of SOLAS and is set out in Appendix 3 to this Notice. It is recommended that the Flow diagrams 1 and 2 set out in Appendix 3 be displayed on ships' bridges as A4 size posters.

4. MSC./Circ.1658 – Guidance on Distress Alerts

This Circular describes the operating procedure for a distress alert, in accordance with Chapter IV of SOLAS, a copy of which is set out in Appendix 4 to this Notice.

The guidance set out in these circulars will come into effect on 1 January 2024 and mariners are requested to ensure that they comply with the relevant procedures.

Note: Marine Notices are issued purely for maritime safety and navigation reasons and should not be construed as conferring rights or granting permissions.

Irish Maritime Administration,
Department of Transport,
Leeson Lane, Dublin 2, D02 TR60, Ireland.

23/11/2023

Encl:

Appendix 1: Guidance for the Reception of Maritime Safety Information and Search and Rescue Related Information as required in the GMDSS

Appendix 2: Flow Chart: GMDSS Operating Guidance for Ships in Distress Situations

Appendix 3: Procedure for Responding to DSC Distress Alerts by Ships

Appendix 4: Guidance on Distress Alerts

For any technical assistance in relation to this Marine Notice, please contact:
The Marine Survey Office, email: MSO@transport.gov.ie.
For general enquiries, please contact the Maritime Safety Policy Division, email:
MaritimeSafetyPolicyDivision@transport.gov.ie.
Written enquiries concerning Marine Notices should be addressed to:
Dept. of Transport, Maritime Safety Policy Division, Leeson Lane, Dublin 2, D02 TR60, Ireland.
email: MarineNotices@transport.gov.ie or visit us at: www.gov.ie/transport.

ANNEX

GUIDANCE FOR THE RECEPTION OF MARITIME SAFETY INFORMATION AND SEARCH AND RESCUE RELATED INFORMATION AS REQUIRED IN THE GLOBAL MARITIME DISTRESS AND SAFETY SYSTEM (GMDSS)

MSI and SAR related information broadcast services

1 Depending on where the ship operates, the following services can be used for the reception of maritime safety information (MSI) and search and rescue (SAR) related information as part of the GMDSS:

.1 International NAVTEX Service,[1] which provides the coordinated broadcast and automatic reception on 518 kHz of MSI and SAR related information by means of narrow-band direct-printing telegraphy using the English language;

.2 High frequency narrow-band direct-printing (HF NBDP) using radio telegraphy as defined in Recommendation ITU-R M.688, as amended; and

.3 International Enhanced Group Call (EGC) service provided by a recognized mobile satellite service:

.1 International SafetyNET services,[2] which provides the coordinated broadcast and automatic reception of MSI and SAR related information via the Inmarsat enhanced group call system, using the English language; and

.2 International Iridium SafetyCast service,[3] which provides the coordinated broadcast and automatic reception of MSI and SAR related information via the enhanced group call system, using the English language.

2 The individual MSI and SAR related information broadcast services in the GMDSS are interdependent. Information that is broadcast via NAVTEX is not necessarily duplicated over an international EGC service or HF NBDP.

3 SAR authorities may broadcast SAR related information over the services described in paragraph 1, as required.

Guidance to meet obligations of SOLAS Chapter IV

4 In order to meet the requirements in SOLAS regulation IV/7.1.4, ships should be provided with equipment appropriate for the entire voyage in which the ship is engaged, as follows:

.1 a receiver capable of receiving international NAVTEX service broadcasts if the ship is engaged on voyages in any area in which an international NAVTEX service is provided; and

1 Refer to revised NAVTEX Manual (MSC.1/Circ.1403/Rev.1).

2 Refer to International SafetyNET Services Manual (MSC.1/Circ.1364/Rev.2).

3 Refer to Interim Iridium SafetyCast Service Manual (MSC.1/Circ.1613/Rev.1).

.2 if the ship is engaged in voyages in which an international NAVTEX service is not provided:

.1 a receiver capable of receiving HF NBDP service when a ship is engaged in voyages where such service is provided; or

.2 receiver(s) capable of receiving broadcasts from an international EGC service identified in paragraph 1.3 which provide(s) a service for the operating areas.

5 The GMDSS Master Plan module in GISIS provides necessary information to identify the coverage area and necessary details for MSI and SAR related information broadcast services related to each NAVAREA and METAREA. The GMDSS Master Plan module[4] is accessible to all registered Public Account holders.[5]

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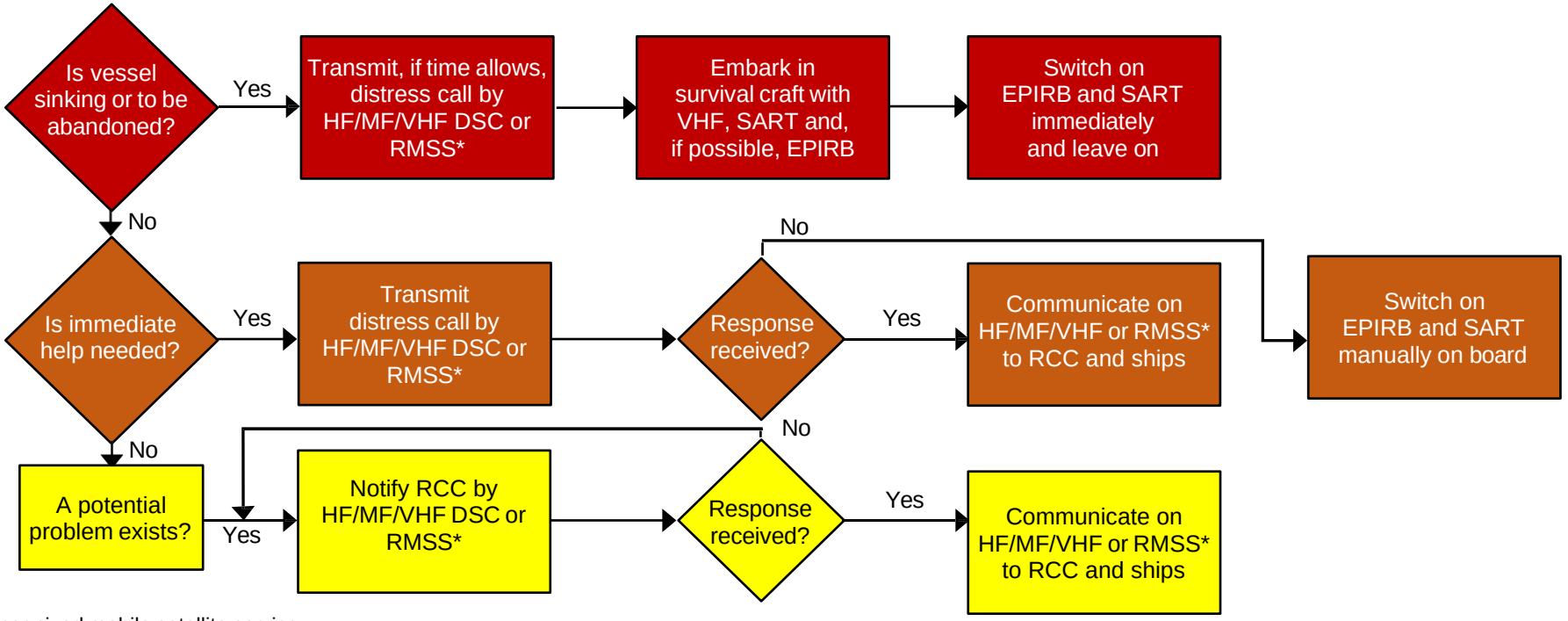
[4] Refer to GMDSS.1/Circ.23.

[5] Any member of the public who is registered with an IMO Web account.

ANNEX

GMDSS OPERATING GUIDANCE FOR SHIPS IN DISTRESS SITUATIONS



* Recognized mobile satellite service

1. EPIRB should float free and activate automatically if it cannot be taken into survival craft.
2. Where necessary, ships should use any appropriate means to alert other ships.
3. Nothing above is intended to preclude the use of any and all available means of distress alerting, including those listed in COLREG 72, annex IV.

Frequencies for Distress Communications

	Digital selective calling (DSC)	Radiotelephone
VHF	Channel 70	Channel 16
MF	2 187.5 kHz	2 182 kHz
HF4	4 207.5 kHz	4 125 kHz
HF6	6 312.0 kHz	6 215 kHz
HF8	8 414.5 kHz	8 291 kHz
HF12	12 577.0 kHz	12 290 kHz
HF16	16 804.5 kHz	16 420 kHz

ANNEX

PROCEDURE FOR RESPONDING TO DSC DISTRESS ALERTS BY SHIPS

1 Introduction

This document provides a procedure for responding to VHF, MF and HF distress alerts, given in flow diagrams 1 and 2, which are recommended to be displayed on the ship's bridge as A4 size posters. It also provides the following guidance.

2 Distress relays

2.1 Radio personnel serving on ships should be made aware of the consequences of transmitting a distress call relay and of routeing a DSC distress alert relay to destinations other than coast stations (CS).

2.2 The number of unintended activations of DSC distress alerts and DSC distress alert relays creates extra workload and confusion for (M)RCCs and also causes delay in the response-time. The original distress alert from a ship in distress should not be disrupted by other ships, by transmitting a DSC distress alert relay.

2.3 Recommendation ITU-R M.541 on *Operational procedures for the use of digital selective-calling equipment in the maritime mobile service* identifies only two situations in which a ship would transmit a distress call relay (distress alert relay):

.1 on receiving a distress alert on an HF channel, which is not acknowledged by a coast station within five minutes. The distress call relay should be addressed to the appropriate coast station (annex 1, paragraph 3.4.2 and annex 3, paragraph 6.1.4); and

.2 on knowing that another ship in distress is not itself able to transmit the distress alert and the master of the ship considers that further help is necessary. The distress call relay should be addressed to "all ships" or to the appropriate coast station (annex 3, paragraph 1.4).

2.4 In no case is a ship permitted to transmit a DSC distress alert relay on receipt of a DSC distress alert on either VHF or MF channels.

2.5 Distress calls relay on HF channels should be initiated manually.

2.6 Compliance with operational and technical provisions above would prevent transmissions of inappropriate distress call relays.

3 All coast stations call

3.1 Recommendation ITU-R M.493 on *Digital selective-calling systems for use in the maritime mobile service* provides for "group calls", an address consisting of the characters corresponding to the station's maritime mobile service identity (MMSI) and a number of Administrations have already assigned a "group call" MMSI to their coast stations in addition to the coast station's individual MMSI.

3.2 By multilateral agreements, a "group call" MMSI could be assigned to all coast stations of a specific region, e.g. an RCC area, and could comply with IMO's requirement without need of introducing further modifications to GMDSS equipment.

3.3 An alternative method to implement an "all coast stations" call without the need to modify Recommendation ITU-R M.493 could be to use the reserved MMSI worldwide as an address for all coast stations, in accordance with Recommendation ITU-R M.585 on *Assignment and use of identities in the maritime mobile service*. However, this solution is not applicable to MF or HF coast stations and would also require a modification of the set-up at each VHF coast station participating in the GMDSS.

4 Authorization

It should be noted that on ships, distress alerts, distress acknowledgements and distress call relays can only be transmitted with the permission of the master of the ship.

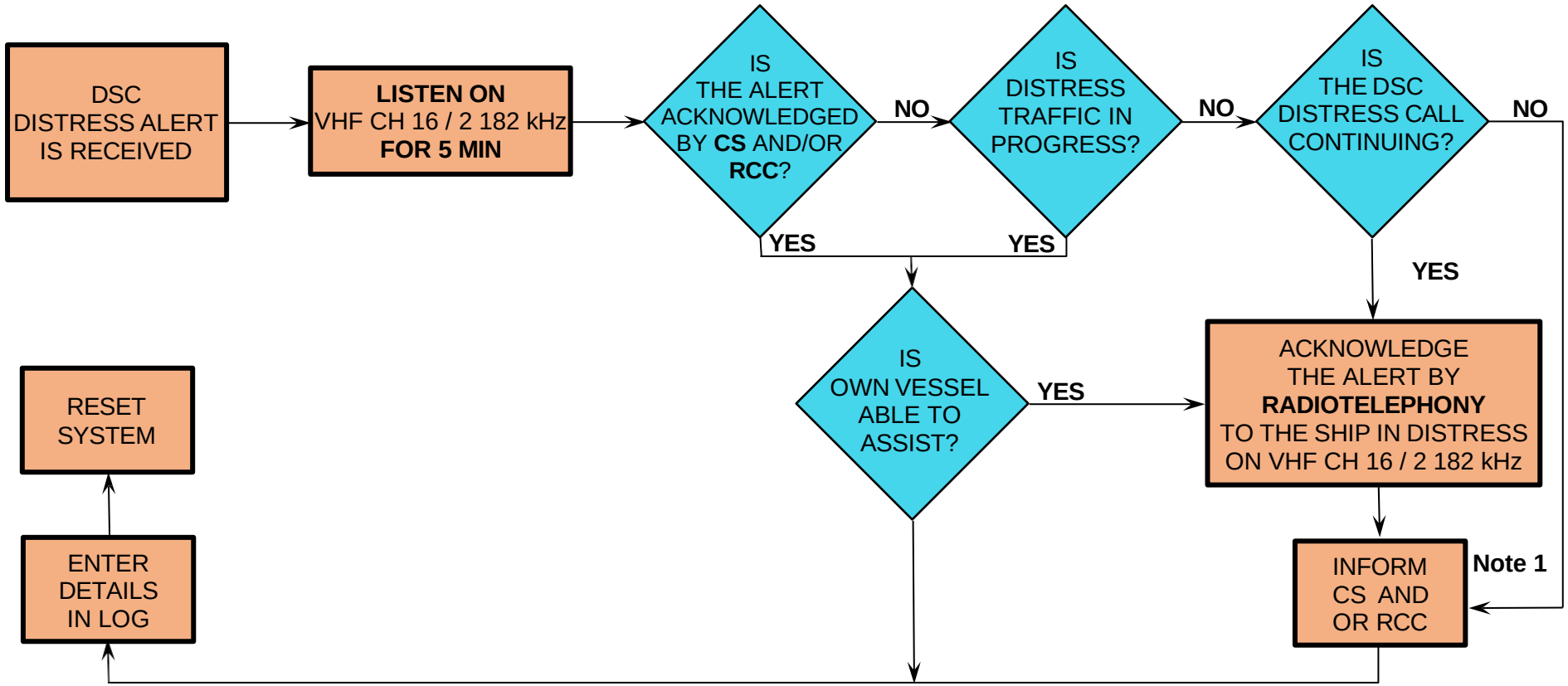
5 Flow diagrams

5.1 The simplified flow diagrams 1 and 2 describe actions to be taken aboard ships upon receipt of distress alerts from other ships. Administrations distribute these flow diagrams widely to ships and training institutions.

5.2 Member Governments are invited to bring the above guidance and the attached flow diagrams to the attention of their shipowners, seafarers, coast stations, RCCs and all others concerned.

FLOW DIAGRAM 1

ACTIONS BY SHIPS UPON RECEPTION OF A **VHF / MF** DSC DISTRESS ALERT



REMARKS:

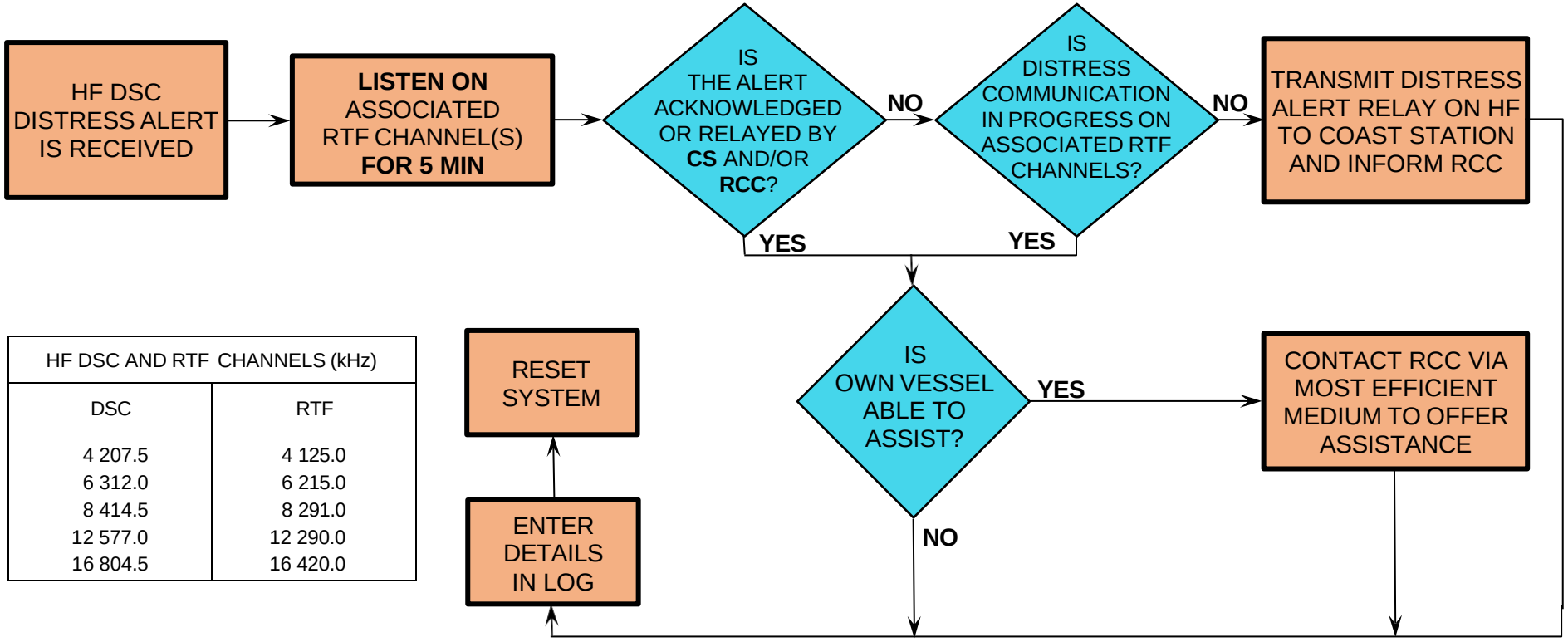
Note 1: Appropriate or relevant RCC and/or coastal station should be informed accordingly. If further DSC distress alerts are received from the same source and the ship in distress is beyond doubt in the vicinity, a DSC acknowledgement may, after consultation with an RCC or coastal station, be sent to terminate the call.

Note 2: In no case is a ship permitted to transmit a DSC distress alert relay on receipt of a DSC distress alert on either VHF channel 70 or MF channel 2 187.5 kHz.

CS = coastal station RCC = rescue coordination centre

FLOW DIAGRAM 2

ACTIONS BY SHIPS UPON RECEPTION OF A **HF** DSC DISTRESS ALERT



HF DSC AND RTF CHANNELS (kHz)	
DSC	RTF
4 207.5	4 125.0
6 312.0	6 215.0
8 414.5	8 291.0
12 577.0	12 290.0
16 804.5	16 420.0

REMARKS:

NOTE 1: If it is clear the ship or persons in distress are not in the vicinity and/or other crafts are better placed to assist, superfluous communications which could interfere with search and rescue activities are to be avoided. Details should be recorded in the appropriate logbook.

NOTE 2: The ship should establish communications with the station controlling the distress as directed and render such assistance as required and appropriate.

NOTE 3: Distress alert relays should be initiated manually.

CS = coastal station RCC = rescue coordination centre

ANNEX

GUIDANCE ON DISTRESS ALERTS