



MARITIME AND PORT AUTHORITY OF SINGAPORE

PORT MARINE CIRCULAR  
NO 18 OF 2005

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Shipping Community  
Harbour Craft Community

### **CAUTION ON THE USE OF VHF RADIO IN COLLISION AVOIDANCE**

1 Many investigations worldwide have revealed that VHF communication is one of the contributing factors in collisions at sea. The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore has on 16 Jun 2005 issued a Shipping Circular ("SC") No. 23 of 2005 on "CAUTION ON THE USE OF VHF RADIO IN COLLISION AVOIDANCE". A copy of this circular is attached.

2 Ship owners, managers and agents are advised to bring the contents of this circular to the attention of their shipmasters and navigational officers.

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SC No. 23 of 2005  
16-06-2005

## CAUTION ON THE USE OF VHF RADIO IN COLLISION AVOIDANCE

Applicable to: This circular is for the attention of shipowners, shipmanagers, masters and crews of Singapore registered ships.

Many investigations worldwide have revealed that VHF communication is one of the contributing factors in collisions at sea. In many of the so called "VHF assisted" collisions, the "VHF communication" between the bridges had created misunderstanding among the officers which led to close quarter situations and collisions. We are of the view that compliance with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea will be more effective to avert a collision rather than the use of VHF communications, based on scanty and unclear information, to avoid a close quarter situation. A recently concluded investigation showed that both the vessels were using VHF communication to agree on a collision avoidance action which led to the collision later.

2 "VHF assisted" collisions, contacts or near misses are not uncommon occurrences at sea. IMO has taken a serious view of this trend and has issued Resolution A. 954(23) on "Proper Use of VHF channels at Sea".

3 Based on our findings and experience in similar occurrences, we believe that such incidents are avoidable. We wish to reinforce this learning among all the masters and navigators serving on Singapore ships through this circular. We take this opportunity to reiterate the following possible dangers involved in the use of VHF communication as a means to avoid collision. The factors to be considered are as follows:

- (a) Uncertainty over the identity of vessels<sup>1</sup>, especially during periods of darkness, poor visibility, and in situations when there is more than one vessel;
- (b) Uncertainty over the interpretation of messages received due to language difficulties and an imprecise or ambiguously expressed message;
- (c) Loss of valuable time in trying to establish contact on VHF radio instead of taking concrete action in accordance with the Collision Regulations; and
- (d) The danger of agreeing to a course of action that does not comply with the Collision Regulations resulting in a situation that the action was intended to avoid.

4 Shipowners, managers and agents are advised to bring the contents of this circular to the attention of their shipmasters and all navigating officers.

5 For any query regarding this circular, please contact Capt Sunil Thapliyal at Tel: 63756209 or Shipping@MPA.gov.sg.

LEE SENG KONG  
DIRECTOR OF MARINE  
MARITIME AND PORT AUTHORITY OF SINGAPORE

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<sup>1</sup>Not applicable where vessels are fitted with AIS