

Notice on strengthening management to minimize
EPIRBs' false distress alerts

To All Ship Owners/Companies concerned,

Since 2000 years, the average rate of false distress alerts for satellite EPIRB is 94.23% in the scope of search and salvation service area in China each year, according to the statistic data of China Transport Telecommunications & Information Center. The situation for the false distress alerts is serious. The issue has been greatly noticed by the Chinese Marine Administration. At present, the Chinese Marine Administration together with relevant units begins to resolve the issue concerning EPIRBs' false distress alerts.

False distress alerts of EPIRB are generally caused by personnel factor and equipment defects, but mainly by personnel factor. There are a lot of reasons bringing false distress alerts, such as: because of the unfamiliar with the function of equipment, EPIRBs are accidentally activated by some crew or maintenance personnel while touching them. Where seawater contacts are fitted, EPIRBs' distress alerts are unconsciously transmitted when ships are flushed by crew. The EPIRBs are activated by relevant personnel during inspection and test as well as teaching due to not observing operation procedure. There are some reports related to false distress alerts when vessels were sold for the purpose of dismantle and changing owner and EPIRB couldn't be controlled by original owners. Some EPIRBs with seawater contacts which were wrongly installed are activated in the storm sea, etc.

EPIRB is a kind of emergency signal equipment. When vessel is in distress, EPIRB will transmit the distress alert signal via

satellites and ACC to search and salvation center, which will start up search and salvation procedure. It is very important for assuring safety of life at sea that send distress signal in time and accurately. The high frequency of false distress alert will not only make difficulty to indentify the real distress signal and disturb the normal searching and salvation works, but also cost the searching and salvation center as well. Therefore, here reminding relevant owners:

1. The use and management regulation should be established or perfected and observed strictly. The management regulation shall set out the given personnel who are responsible for routine maintenance of EPIRBs on board, and others without being trained professionally will be forbidden to touch the EPIRBs. The requirements for maintenance and periodic inspections of EPIRBs should be established, the responsible personnel shall check periodically aspect of cases, labeling, seal, mounting, battery and hydrostatic release expiry date, and shall make sure of EPIRBs no sighs of damage or cracks, identification integrity and clarity, seal in good condition, no water ingress, mounted firmly and correctly, battery and hydrostatic release replaced in time on due date. A notice related to EPIRB is necessary that put crew up to ways of flushing ship in order to avoid seawater switches activated unconsciously, or that no obstacles round EPIRB are allowed to deposit and bestow which will affect fetching equipment and float-free release. There is a need to institute EPIRBs safekeeping measure for prevention of false distress alerts in the special cases, such as ships berthing at a wharf or under repair. Management regulation shall include the cancel procedure after false distress alert. Annual testing and shore-based maintenance at five years intervals for EPIRBs should be carried out by approved professional providers or competent personnel, and forbid others to dismantle and inspect EPIRBs. Report of annual testing and shore-based maintenances at five years intervals and records of periodic self-test on board should be preserved properly. There will be management regulations on

ships' information changes (for example, the changes of owner, name of ship, flag of vessel, and registration port etc.) and renewal of EPIRBs as well as ships' scrap. When above-mentioned changes occur, owners should in time report to Administration to register or cancel EPIRBs' identification, name of ship, call sign/MMSI for the purpose of maintaining veracity of registration database and preventing EPIRBs from false distress alerts as incapable of control.

2. To strengthen trains on basic knowledge and operation skill about EPIRB, to make crew understand EPIRBs' important role in the safety of life at sea and learn from the train of EPIRBs' structure, activating way, situation showing alerts and cancel procedure after false distress alerts etc. in order to prevent crew from starting up distress alert system unconsciously, and being unaware of that beacon has been activated after false distress alerts. The professional trains for EPIRBs' responsible personnel should be further strengthened. It is necessary for shipmasters, pilot personnel and radio operator to be acquainted with performance, structure, operate, mounting, routine maintenance, methods of inspection and test for equipments, and disposal procedure once EPIRBs' distress alerts systems are accidentally activated.

For resolving the issues of EPIRBs' false distress alerts, corresponding measures and regulation are being further researched and perfected by Chinese Marine Administration and relevant units. Among the measures taking precautions against false alerts, there will be possibility to adopt severer punitive measures. All ship owners concerned shall, please, pay more attention to EPIRBs' false distress alerts, strengthen crew education and train, as well as their management of EPIRBs, make effort together with parties concerned to minimize EPIRBs' false distress alerts.

Classed Ship in Service Department
China Classification Society