Transport Canada / Transports Canada

MARINE SECURITY OPERATIONS BULLETIN

No: 2025-002

PROCEDURES TO MEET THE SHIP SECURITY ALERT SYSTEM (SSAS) REQUIREMENTS FOR CANADIAN REGISTERED VESSELS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE *MARINE TRANSPORTATION SECURITY REGULATIONS* (MTSRs).

PURPOSE

To provide guidance to vessel owners, operators, Company Security Officers (CSO), Vessel Security Officers[1] (VSO) and Masters of Canadian registered SOLAS ships of the general requirements of SSAS[2] and related procedures.

This Bulletin replaces Marine Security Bulletin 2012-004.

SCOPE

This bulletin applies to all Canadian registered SOLAS ships as defined in the MTSR.

BACKGROUND

The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), Chapter XI-2/6 mandates the carriage of shipboard equipment for sending covert alerts that indicate the security of the ship is under threat or has been compromised (such as piracy, terrorism or armed robbery). SOLAS requires that the SSAS is capable of being activated from the navigation bridge and at least one other location on the vessel.

The SSAS is required to conform to performance standards equivalent to those adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). IMO Resolution MSC.136 (76) on *Performance Standards for a Ship Security Alert System* and resolution MSC.147 (77) on Adoption of the Revised *Performance Standards for a Ship Security Alert System* establish the associated performance standards.

In Canada, SSAS requirements are implemented through the MTSR, sections 222 to 227. In addition, the procedures below establish the manner in which Transport Canada administers SSAS related activities.

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[1] The MTSR uses the term "vessel" instead of "ship" as is found in ISPS, so this MSOB will refer to the terms of Vessel Security Officer (VSO) and Vessel Security Plan (VSP) throughout.

[2] For ease of reference this MSOB will use the term of Ship Security Alert System (SSAS) as is found in ISPS

With respect to SSAS testing, the provisions of paragraphs II.3 and II.4 of the annex to MSC/Circ.1155, guidance on the message priority and the testing of ship security alert systems, should be observed. In addition, MSC/Circ.1072, MSC/Circ. 1155 and MSC.1/Circ.1190 provide additional important information regarding SSAS that should be read in conjunction with this bulletin. These circulars confirm that the development of procedures and protocols respecting SSAS testing are the responsibility of each individual flag state Administration and provide guidelines for notification of the flag state Administrations when SSAS are tested.

The approved Vessel Security Plan (VSP) must clearly describe the security procedures, instructions and guidance on the use of the SSAS, and must address the testing, activation, de-activation and resetting of the system to limit false alerts. Vessel operators are reminded that a SOLAS ship will be unable to obtain an International Ship Security Certificate unless the vessel meets the MTSR SSAS requirements and all other inspection and documentation requirements.

DIRECTIVE

General MTSR Requirements for SSAS:

SSAS on board Canadian SOLAS ships must:

- Be capable of being activated from the navigation bridge;
- Be capable of being activated from at least one other location on board the vessel;
- Be installed in such as manner to prevent inadvertent activation;
- When activated, continue to transmit the ship security alert until deactivated and/or reset;
- Have a secondary/emergency power source;
- Be capable of initiating and transmitting a ship-to-shore security alert to Transport Canada Marine Security Operations via an Internet Service Provider (to obtain the email address please contact Marine Security Operations directly via email at: marsec1@tc.gc.ca).
  ** Once in possession of the TC SSAS email address, it is to be treated as strictly confidential and not to be shared outside your organization. This email address is shared with you on a need-to-know basis **
- Issue a secure signal that will not alert any other vessels; and
- When activated, transmit a silent alert and not raise any alarm on board the vessel.

1. SSAS Testing Procedures

The IMO circular MSC/Circ.1155, Part II, paragraph 4 states: "Ships, Companies, Administrations and Recognized Security Organizations (RSO) should ensure that when ship security alert systems are to be tested those concerned are notified so that the testing of the ship security alert system does not inadvertently lead to unintended emergency response actions." Therefore, pre-notification must be provided to Transport Canada not more than 5 days in advance, and not less than 4 hours prior to the SSAS test. This is to enable effective tracking of notifications and to ensure that the system does not inadvertently lead to unintended emergency response actions. Pre-notifications are requested by telephone at 1-888-857-4003, with a follow up email sent to marsec1@tc.gc.ca.

For routine testing, Transport Canada requests that all parties concerned conduct SSAS tests Monday to Friday during normal business hours (08:00 to 16:00 Eastern Time). If a SSAS test is required outside of regular hours due to exceptional circumstances where it is impossible to run the test during normal business hours as indicated above, Transport Canada personnel may be contacted by dialing 1-888-857-4003. Transport Canada will then assess the possibility of an after-hours test being conducted and will communicate its final decision to the Operator. In either case, pre-notification of a SSAS test must be given, with a minimum of four hours advance warning. With the exception of urgent situations, these pre-notifications should be sent Monday to Friday during normal business hours.

All alert messages are to be sent to Transport Canada via an Internet Service Provider (ISP) to a specific SSAS email address that will have been provided to the CSO in advance. The alert message must also be sent to the CSO. In addition, the alert message may also be sent to the operator/company/RSO (if desired), in accordance with the approved VSP.

The CSO may request the SSAS email address by contacting Transport Canada via the marsec1@tc.gc.ca email account.

The SSAS test message must be configured to clearly indicate it is a test. The word "TEST" must appear in either the body of the message or in the subject heading. This is to ensure that the testing of the SSAS does not inadvertently lead to unintended emergency response actions. As an example, the content or subject line of a SSAS test message may include "--- TEST, TEST, TEST---"or "This message is for TEST purposes only, please disregard."

SSAS messages must contain the following data elements. Each element must be clearly identified in the message:

1. Registered name of the vessel;
2. IMO number (e.g.: IMO #1234567);
3. International Call Sign;
4. MMSI number - Maritime Mobile Service Identity or MMSI number part of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System;
5. Position of vessel at the time the activation (Latitude and Longitude);
6. Date/time of vessel's position, (example: At 17:59 2006-03-13 UTC, the vessel was at the position described above);
7. Course of the vessel (degrees in numerical value, ex: 0 or 135);
8. Speed of the vessel (knots in numerical value, ex: 0 or 23);
9. Nature of distress (state "under threat" or "security compromised"); and
10. Company Security Officer, or their delegated Alternate Company Security Officer (ACSO), and their 24-hour contact phone number.

Upon receiving a SSAS test message, Transport Canada will acknowledge receipt of your test message via a telephone call and subsequently, will share a summary of results via email message with the CSO.

In instances where the SSAS equipment is submitting inaccurate critical information or if the equipment is verified to be faulty and continues to transmit repeated false alerts, or if the SSAS requires repairs or replacement, the CSO shall notify Transport Canada of the situation and proposed course of action via email at marsec1@tc.gc.ca and by telephone at 1-888-857-4003. In collaboration with the Marine Security Regional Office and the Regional Transportation Security Inspector (TSI) assigned to the vessel, the CSO is to make all relevant arrangements without undue delay to rectify the situation. The Regional TSI in collaboration with the Marine Security Duty Inspector (HQ) will review the CSO's proposal for repair to determine if it is acceptable. Also, and in collaboration with the Regional TSI, the CSO will implement interim security procedures approved by Transport Canada when a SSAS unit is no longer operational until it is fully restored to normal operation. Once the SSAS equipment has been restored to normal operation, the CSO must notify Transport Canada using the same email address and telephone number as noted above to schedule a test of the SSAS.

Vessel owners, operators, RSOs and CSOs shall ensure that internal corresponding emails are not forwarded or cc-listed to the Transport Canada SSAS email account. The Transport Canada SSAS email account is for the exclusive use of on-board Canadian SOLAS SSAS unit activations only. All general email correspondence with Transport Canada regarding SSAS activities must be directed to the marsec1@tc.gc.ca email account.

The procedures for testing the SSAS should be in accordance with MSC/Circ.1155 and Transport Canada requirements. The frequency of SSAS tests remain at the discretion of the vessel owners, operators and CSOs. At a minimum, they must occur for Transport Canada initial inspections for certification, intermediate inspections, and renewal inspections for recertification of a vessel. A SSAS test will be valid for certification purposes if a satisfactory test result was received within 30 days prior to the scheduled inspection date. A SSAS test is also required to support system replacement or repair. SSAS tests should be conducted in accordance with the SSAS testing procedures section of this document.

Upon the completion of any SSAS test, Transport Canada will advise of the outcome via email after verbally consulting with the CSO or ACSO. The applicable Regional TSI will be copied on this written outcome, and if it is found to be an unsuccessful test, the Regional TSI will then follow up accordingly with the CSO and/or ACSO to ensure any deficiencies are rectified prior to a scheduled re-test. The timeline to have any unit failures or degradations fixed and another SSAS test re-scheduled will be determined between the Regional TSI and the CSO and/or ACSO.

2. SSAS Test Messages Received Without Pre-Notification

Transport Canada will regard any SSAS test message received without pre-notification as a real activation and will act accordingly until otherwise notified by the appropriate authority (CSO or their delegated ACSO).

In accordance with IMO circular MSC/Circ 1155, when the SSAS accidentally transmits a signal vessels, companies, Administrations, delegated organizations for SSAS management, and RSOs should act expeditiously to ensure that all concerned parties are made aware that the alert is false and that no emergency response action should be taken.

If a real activation is confirmed by the CSO, Transport Canada will maintain communication with the operator, CSO or their delegated ACSO and all relevant parties until the case is considered closed. The operator has an obligation to provide any relevant information to Transport Canada, when requested.

3. SSAS Transmission Limitations

It is understood that some service providers relating to the shipboard SSAS are providing reports on vessel location positions and other data on a regular basis to the CSO and companies as an automatic update. It should be noted that Transport Canada should not be included as a recipient for such information. The transmission of information from the ship's SSAS to Transport Canada should be limited to information pertaining to actual security alerts and test alerts.

4. False Alerts

Notwithstanding the above vessel owners, operators, RSO, CSO or their delegated ACSO, VSO and Masters of Canadian SOLAS ships are reminded that in the event a false alert is inadvertently transmitted, expeditious actions should be made to ensure that all concerned parties are made aware that the alert is false and that no emergency actions are initiated.

5. SOLAS Ships Changing Flag

Transport Canada reminds vessel operators that when a SOLAS ship is deleted or suspended from the Canadian Registry, they must immediately notify Transport Canada, make all necessary arrangements for the reprogramming of the SSAS in accordance with the appropriate Flag State procedures (if applicable), and advise Transport Canada once this has been completed by sharing an email including all detailed information via the marsec1@tc.gc.ca account and to also include the Regional TSI in charge of their certification file.

When a SOLAS ship is registered in the Canadian registry, the operator must make all necessary arrangements for the reprogramming or installation of the SSAS, as appropriate, and notify Transport Canada. The vessel will be required to conduct a SSAS real activation "Alert" and SSAS "Test". Satisfactory testing of the SSAS alert function and the SSAS test function from both the navigation bridge and secondary location is required to obtain an International Ship Security Certificate.

This provision also applies to Canadian vessels using the bareboat provision within the [Canada Shipping Act 2001, section 48](#), which allows frequent change of flag between Canadian and foreign flags. Section 48 states that a vessel that is registered in a foreign State and is listed as a bareboat chartered vessel is suspended in respect of the right to fly the Canadian Flag.

6. SSAS on Non-SOLAS Ships or Vessels not Regulated by the MTSR

Transport Canada recognizes that vessels that are not required to carry a SSAS under the MTSR, and vessels that are not regulated by the MTSR may install SSAS equipment and test it by following their associated procedures using their CSO or other established arrangements. Transport Canada recognizes this as good business practice and encourages these companies and operators to manage their own internal security processes and any associated procedures for their respective vessels.

The MTSR states that only SOLAS ships, as defined in MTSR, are required to carry SSAS equipment on board, and as such, any vessel that is not a SOLAS ship cannot use the Transport Canada SSAS monitoring and response system.

Transport Canada will not respond directly to non-SOLAS SSAS alerts. Responding to SSAS messages originating from unregulated vessels or vessels not subject to MTSR SSAS requirements is outside the scope of the Transport Canada's mandate. Transport Canada Marine Security Operations will ensure that any such incident or event is immediately passed on to the appropriate authority.

7. Changes to SSAS Contact Information

Vessel owners, operators, RSOs, CSO or their delegated ACSO, VSO and Masters of Canadian SOLAS ships are also reminded that all changes to the SSAS or CSO contact information must be immediately updated in the SSAS unit and reported to Transport Canada via email at marsec1@tc.gc.ca, as well as notify the relevant regional office. As noted in Section 5 of these procedures, if a Canadian SOLAS ship changes its flag to that of a foreign administration, it is imperative that Transport Canada's contact information must be removed from the SSAS unit and emergency contact information for the new flag state must be entered.

8. Transport Canada Contact Information

The 24/7 direct telephone number relating to SSAS support is 1-888-857-4003.

Further information is available on the Transport Canada Marine Security website:
http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/marinesecurity/menu.htm

Any comments, suggestions or concerns can be addressed to the Director of Marine Security Operations at: dirops.marsec-sumar@tc.gc.ca.

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Aiden Ryan
Director
Marine Security Operations

Related Source Documents:

- *Marine Transportation Security Regulations* (MTSR)
- IMO MSC.136(76), Annex 7 (11 December 2002) – *Performance Standards for a Ship Security Alert System*, as amended from time to time
- IMO resolution MSC.147(77), Annex 5 (29 May 2003) - *Performance Standards for a Ship Security Alert System*, as amended from time to time
- IMO MSC/Circ.1072 (26 June 2003) – *Guidance on Provisions of Ship Security Alert Systems*
- IMO MSC/Circ. 1155 (23 May 2005) - *Guidance on the Message Priority and the Testing of Ship Security Alert Systems*
- IMO MSC.1/Circ.1190 (30 May 2006) - *Guidance on the Provision of information for Identifying Ships when Transmitting Ship Security Alerts*