

October 26, 2004

## **FLEET / SAFETY LETTER 04073.GEN**

### **RE: EPIRB ALERTS; 24-HOUR EMERGENCY INFORMATION; OTHER RELATED ISSUES**

We continue to have significant and time consuming problems regarding EPIRBs and EPIRB alerts and have identified 3 major issues: outdated emergency contact information, improper EPIRB encoding, and improper handling of EPIRBs. We encourage all owners to take a positive and pro-active approach in an attempt to assist us deal with these issues.

Accordingly, to ensure that the correct data is available, that crew members know how to handle EPIRBs, and that EPIRBs are encoded correctly, please review the following:

### **OUTDATED OR INCORRECT EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION**

Upon initial registration of a vessel the shipowner is required to complete Form A1. Section 39 of Form A1, "**24 Hour Emergency Contact for Safety Alerts**" must be fully completed. A vessel will not be registered until this section has been completed. This information is used to assist us to contact the shipowner/manager in the event of an EPIRB alert or other emergency.

Obviously, if correct information is not provided, or changes in contact details after initial registration are not provided, we will be unable to contact the shipowner in an emergency. It remains the owner's responsibility to provide updated information regularly.

We enclose as Annex 1 a new 24 Hour Emergency Contact Information form. ***This form must be completed for every vessel currently registered in Vanuatu, regardless of whether the vessel is laid-up or operating. The completed form must be submitted no later than December 20, 2004.*** (This form is also available on our website: [www.vanuatuships.com](http://www.vanuatuships.com).)

### **IMPROPER CODING OF EPIRB**

We have found that a significant number of EPIRBs in the Vanuatu fleet are improperly encoded. They must be encoded by a qualified service technician using the MMSI assigned to the vessel by this office. If the EPIRB is not properly encoded, we will be unable to identify the vessel at risk, or its owners or operators, when an alert is transmitted. Vanuatu uses the "maritime user" protocol. The Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) assigned to the vessel is made up of the MID (Marine Identification Digits) of "576," and an SSI (Ship Station Identifier) which is a 6 digit number, the last 3 digits of which are always "000." No other protocol (serialized user, maritime/location, etc.) is acceptable. Encoded call signs are not acceptable.

A vessel pending Vanuatu registration is assigned a unique MMSI number and the shipowner is sent instructions to ensure proper encoding of the EPIRB. These instructions specifically state that once the EPIRB is encoded with the assigned MMSI number, this office must be provided with the hexadecimal identification. If we do not receive the "hex ID," we will have no way of knowing if the EPIRB has been properly encoded.

Another problem associated with improper EPIRB encoding is that an EPIRB is not re-coded with another MMSI when the:

- EPIRB is removed and installed on a different vessel (recoding is required)
- vessel is transferred to or from another flag (recoding with the new flag's MMSI)
- vessel is scrapped (MMSI deleted and the battery is removed from the EPIRB)

More often than not, owners fail to notify us when an EPIRB is being removed from a vessel. When an EPIRB is removed from a vessel, or a vessel is deleted from the Vanuatu registry, the MMSI assigned to the EPIRB **must** be changed. Likewise, when the EPIRB is removed from the original vessel and re-installed on another Vanuatu vessel, the EPIRB **must** be re-coded with the MMSI assigned to the receiving vessel.

There have been a number of instances where an alert has been thought to have come from a vessel to which the MMSI had been assigned, only to discover that the vessel's EPIRB did not go off. On investigation, we have found out that the original EPIRB was removed from its assigned vessel and installed on another vessel with the original MMSI still encoded in the EPIRB.

Similarly, when a vessel is transferred to another flag, the EPIRB **must** be immediately re-encoded with the new flag's MMSI and this office must be notified. There have been more than a few alerts coming from vessels that were long deleted from the registry. **Confirmation that a vessel's EPIRB has been encoded with the new MMSI number is now required for vessel deletion.** A registry cancellation certificate will only be issued upon receipt of this confirmation.

In the very recent past, we have had numerous alerts emanating from a vessel thought to be the ***El Zorro Grande II*** operating in Carmen, Mexico. On investigation we found the alert continued even after the EPIRB was removed from the ***El Zorro Grande II*** and both the EPIRB and battery were sent ashore to the ship manager's office. To date we have not been able to identify the vessel with the activated EPIRB and are baffled as to how this could have happened.

In another case occurring at the same time as the ***El Zorro Grande II*** incident, we received an alert from a unit with the 576 MID but encoded with a serialized user protocol. Without that EPIRB being properly registered with us, there is no way possible to identify that vessel.

Annex 2 contains a listing of alerts during 2003 and 2004. Perhaps you will recognize one or more of the vessels. We have listed the hexadecimal IDs of the unknown vessels in case you can assist to identify the errant EPIRBs.

## **IMPROPER HANDLING**

One common cause of false EPIRB alerts resulting in possibly as many as 50 percent of all alerts, is improper handling of the EPIRB by the ship's personnel or radio surveyors. There have been many cases where EPIRBs have been activated during testing. Manufacturers' instructions must be closely followed to ensure the unit is not inadvertently activated when being tested.

EPIRBs are sometimes activated when hit by green water in heavy seas or during water wash down. Other activations have been caused by degradation of the plastic casings or neoprene gaskets but these activations are few in comparison to improper handling and incorrect testing. .

We have even had one unit activated when thieves broke into a pleasure yacht and attempted to steal the unit.

Most false EPIRB alerts can be avoided. In fact, since 1981, we have had several hundred false alerts but only 4 true alerts.

We seek your cooperation in reducing the number of false EPIRB alerts and minimizing the related problems by asking you to follow a few simple guidelines:

- Confirm the hexadecimal code with this office once the EPIRB is encoded
- Decode the EPIRB when the vessel is deleted from the Vanuatu registry or the EPIRB is moved to another vessel
- Update the emergency contact information as soon as it changes. Submit a new Form A!, Section 39 immediately. (Note: Shipowners will now be required to complete this form on an annual basis.)
- Ensure that the crew is properly trained in handling EPIRBs

If these simple guidelines are followed, the number of false EPIRB alerts can be reduced dramatically and when the EPIRB does activate, we can quickly identify and notify the owners of the alerting vessel.

Thank you

Donald J. Sheetz  
Executive Vice President

Encl.

**Website: [www.vanuatuships.com](http://www.vanuatuships.com)**

## Annex 2

### **2003 and 2004 EPIRB ALERTS**

EPIRB ALERT	VESSEL NAME	EPIRB ALERT	VESSEL NAME
<b>2003</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2004</b>
03EPIRB001	HANS TIDE	04EPIRB001	<b>UNIDENTIFIABLE</b>
03EPIRB002	OSA DUNDEE	04EPIRB002	OIL TRACER
03EPIRB003	MIDNIGHT STAR	04EPIRB003	GSF RIG 127
03EPIRB004	MAMMOTH TIDE	04EPIRB004	PALMAS SERVICE
03EPIRB005	GSF MONITOR	04EPIRB005	PACIFIC GAS
03EPIRB006	GULF BATTLER	04EPIRB006	RICHARD PHILIPPI
03EPIRB007	GULF BATTLER	04EPIRB007	OSTERTOR
03EPIRB008	<b>UNIDENTIFIABLE</b>	04EPIRB008	KIKORI TIDE
03EPIRB009	CHUN YING NO. 212	04EPIRB009	MISS FRIEDA
03EPIRB010	HOJIN	04EPIRB010	GSF BALTIC
03EPIRB011	MIDNIGHT STAR	04EPIRB011	NICO RASHIDYA
03EPIRB012	ARMIA KRAJOWA	04EPIRB012	SEEKER
03EPIRB013	<b>CRYSTAL 102 (DEL)</b>	04EPIRB013	SOZIDANIE ( <i>REAL</i> )
03EPIRB014	RACHEL	04EPIRB014	WILLIAM R CROYLE
03EPIRB015	OWEN TIDE II	04EPIRB015	CANYON HORIZON
03EPIRB016	RUSSELL TIDE	04EPIRB016	RED FOX
03EPIRB017	GRAND SEAHORSE	04EPIRB017	C8122F3911E9C74
03EPIRB018	CONST. SERVICE	04EPIRB018	GSF ADRIATIC IV ( <i>REAL</i> )
03EPIRB019	TAYLOR TIDE	04EPIRB019	GSF RIG 135
03EPIRB020	GLOB. COMANCHE	04EPIRB020	PRINCESS TIDE
03EPIRB021	GULF FLEET 65	04EPIRB021	GRANDE TIDE
03EPIRB022	PACIFIC MOON	04EPIRB022	<b>NOT EL ZORRO GRANDE II</b>
03EPIRB023	OCEAN PROJECT	04EPIRB023	<b>NOT EL ZORRO GRANDE II</b>
03EPIRB024	KOOCK TIDE	04EPIRB024	<b>C80DD39534017DA</b>
03EPIRB025	WIGGINS TIDE	04EPIRB025	GSF JACK RYAN
03EPIRB026	GSF RIG 124	04EPIRB026	PRIDE NEVADA
03EPIRB027	OCEAN CONSTRUCTOR	04EPIRB027	<b>C80D411FOC001AD</b>
03EPIRB028	DUSHANE TIDE	04EPIRB028	PRIDE NEVADA
03EPIRB029	FONG SEONG 818 (DSC)	04EPIRB029	MORECAMBE DIVER
03EPIRB030	SUPREME HARVEST	04EPIRB030	<b>C80D00D83497C5</b>
03EPIRB031	OFFSHORE MONARCH	04EPIRB031	ATLET 7
03EPIRB032	IVORY ACE	04EPIRB032	GSF PARAMESWARA
03EPIRB033	OCEAN PROJECT		
03EPIRB034	NICO RASHIDYA		
03EPIRB035	MERIDIAN I		
03EPIRB036	THORNHILL		
03EPIRB037	GLOBAL CHEYENNE		
03EPIRB038	SILVER RIVER		
03EPIRB039	AMAZON RIVER		
03EPIRB040	GSF MONITOR		
03EPIRB041	<b>AMANDA (DEL)</b>		
03EPIRB042	GSF MONITOR		
03EPIRB043	GSF BALTIC		

			<p><i><b>Bold: Unknown or deleted vessels or real alerts.</b></i></p>
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# VANUATU MARITIME SERVICES LIMITED

## ***MORE THAN A FLAG OF QUALITY***

42 Broadway, Suite 1200-18  
 New York, New York 10004-1617  
 website: <http://www.vanuatuships.com>

Telephone: 212 425-9600

Direct E-mail: [drescigno@vanuatuships.com](mailto:drescigno@vanuatuships.com)

Facsimile: 212 425-9652

### 24-HOUR EMERGENCY / OPERATIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

VESSEL NAME	OFFICIAL NUMBER	MMSI	HEXCODE
		576 000	
		576 000	
		576 000	
		576 000	
		576 000	

#### COMPANY / ADDRESS

<b>Name:</b>
<b>Address:</b>
<b>City/State/Country/Zip:</b>

#### CONTACT(s) DETAILS

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
<b>Telephone Number(s):</b>	<b>Fax:</b>
<b>At Home Telephone:</b>	<b>Mobile:</b>
<b>Other Numbers:</b>	<b>Email:</b> @
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
<b>Telephone Number(s):</b>	<b>Fax:</b>
<b>At Home:</b>	<b>Mobile:</b>
<b>Other Numbers:</b>	<b>Email:</b> @

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

*PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED FORM TO DEE RESCIGNO VIA FAX OR EMAIL .  
 THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION IN THIS MATTER.*