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## **Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) and Port Information, Responsibilities of the UK Competent Authority, Statutory Harbour Authorities and VTS Authorities**

Note to Port and VTS Authorities, VTS Operators, Masters and Deck Officers of Merchant Vessels and Skippers and Watchkeepers of Fishing and recreational Vessels.

This note should be read in conjunction with MGN 238 and MGN 240, which contains information about Port Information.

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### *Summary*

The purpose of this guidance note is to set out the national responsibilities of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) as the United Kingdom "Competent Authority for VTS" and those of individual "VTS Authorities" in pursuance of IMO Resolution A.857(20) and MSC/Circular 952. This note recognises the responsibilities, particular to the UK, vested in individual ports as "Statutory Harbour Authorities" through relevant legislation, the Port Marine Safety Code and the Guide to Good Practice.

### *Key Points*

- This note is developed from existing international guidelines; IMO Resolution A.857(20) & IALA VTS Manual (2002) and takes into account the UK's particular situation.
- It defines the responsibilities of those authorities concerned with VTS and the provision of Port Information in the UK.
- It complements the Port Marine Safety Code and the Guide to Good Practice on the management of safety in ports.

### Note

Although this MGN is aimed essentially at shore based establishments, there is merit in its distribution to a wider audience. To promote awareness of the important contribution that VTS and Port Information make to the maritime industry and to indicate the approach to VTS adopted in the UK, it is appropriate that all recipients of VTS and Port Information receive this information.

The Port Marine Safety Code and the Guide to Good Practice were published by the Department for Transport (DfT) in March 2000 and March 2002 respectively.

## 1 Introduction

The term VTS is used in this document in the same specific sense as in the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) documentation referenced.<sup>1</sup> This describes three categories of service (Information Service, Navigational Assistance Service and Traffic Organisation Service) by reference to their functionality. It also specifies a standard for training leading to a certificate (V-103/1 and V-103/2). The term VTS is used to describe systems that both have the functionality specified and are operated by people trained to the V103 standard. The training standard has been developed to encompass VTS operations ranging from provision of an Information Service to Traffic Organisation Service. The latter may be more than the requirements many ports derive from their risk assessment. However, this guidance is intended for those harbour authorities with – or proposing – all types of VTS, which necessarily require operators to be trained to the V103 standard.

These guidelines should be used in conjunction with IMO Resolution A.857(20) Guidelines for VTS, IALA Recommendation V-119, The Implementation of Vessel Traffic Services, the IALA VTS Manual 2002, the Port Marine Safety Code and the Guide to Good Practice.

## 2 Areas of Responsibility

The MCA is the Competent Authority for VTS within UK territorial waters. This includes the assessment of the need and type of Coastal VTS (see MGN 240 section 3) within those waters but excluding the areas of jurisdiction of individual Harbour Authorities. The Competent Authority for VTS may also be a VTS Authority in its own right for waters outside the limits of individual Harbour Authorities.

A Statutory Harbour Authority is responsible for assessing the need and type of VTS, or the need for Port Information, within its own port limits in accordance with the Port Marine Safety Code. Where it is decided that a VTS is required, the Statutory Harbour Authority becomes the VTS Authority within its own port limits.

The VTS Authority is responsible for the operation of the categories of service prescribed within the area designated for each individual VTS. A VTS Authority may initiate the exchange of information with vessels approaching its service area, in order to ensure the smooth integration of traffic into the VTS Area.

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<sup>1</sup> IMO Resolution A.857(20) and the IALA VTS Manual 2002

- 3      **Competent Authority For VTS**      (12)      Maintaining a database of UK VTS and their capabilities;
- Responsibilities of the MCA, as the Competent Authority for VTS, are as follows :
- (13)      Audit and review the performance of Coastal VTSs, recommending and facilitating improvements, where necessary.
- (1)      Leading on national policy for UK VTS;
- (2)      Providing advice to government on legislation with respect to the operation of a VTS within UK territorial waters;
- (3)      Establishing and reviewing the national standards and definitions for the three categories of VTS;
- (4)      Establishing and reviewing the national standards and definitions for provision of Port Information;<sup>2</sup>
- (5)      Assessing the need for Coastal VTS within territorial waters but outside the areas of jurisdiction of Statutory Harbour Authorities;
- (6)      Establishing VTS Authorities for Coastal VTSs, ensuring that necessary arrangements are in place and setting the objectives and types of service offered by them;
- (7)      Establishing and reviewing training standards for all VTS personnel and those who provide Port Information;
- (8)      Providing accreditation of training colleges involved in VTS training and conducting a regular review of training and training standards;
- (9)      Developing guidelines for VTS manning and equipment standards;
- (10)      Ensuring that any reporting requirement for incidents involving VTS aligns with the national reporting requirements for navigational incidents;
- (11)      Providing guidance to assist VTS Authorities in evaluating the performance of their VTS;
- 4      **Statutory Harbour Authority**
- The powers of individual Statutory Harbour Authorities have been established by or under an Act of Parliament. They have powers and duties within defined geographical areas. In the context of VTS their responsibilities include the requirement to :
- (1)      Establish the need for a VTS or provision of Port Information by means of a Formal Risk Assessment into the safety of navigation, as required by the Port Marine Safety Code and taking into account the standards established by the Competent Authority for VTS;
- (2)      Establish the category of VTS or whether Port Information is to be provided, based on the outcome of a Formal Risk Assessment;
- (3)      Ensure that a legal basis for the operation of a VTS is provided for;
- (4)      Ensure the VTS has been delegated the appropriate authority to fulfil its duties;
- (5)      Where a VTS is established, act as a "VTS Authority" as indicated below;
- (6)      Publish details and the types of service that are to be provided in the appropriate nautical publications. (see Annex 1);
- (7)      Provide information on all published services, including the details of radio watches, designated frequencies, hours of operation and the defined type(s) of service offered.

<sup>2</sup> See MGN 238 or MGN 240

- 5 **VTS Authority**
- VTS contributes to safety of life at sea, safety and efficiency of navigation and protection of the marine environment, adjacent shore areas, worksites and offshore installations from possible adverse effects of maritime traffic.<sup>3</sup> In pursuance of these objectives, VTS authorities should :
- (1) Operate the VTS within national and international guidelines and legislation (see Annex 2);
  - (2) Ensure that operators are trained to the appropriate national standards and that their qualifications are kept current;
  - (3) Establish operating procedures for VTS and for the implementation of emergency contingency plans;
  - (4) Carry out regular training and exercises for VTS staff in operating and emergency response procedures;
  - (5) Regularly review VTS operations to ensure that the service is harmonised with ship reporting, routing instructions, aids to navigation, pilotage and port operations as appropriate;
- (6) Report any apparent infringement of byelaws and directions to the appropriate authority;
  - (7) Maintain appropriate standards of communications on channels assigned for VTS purposes;
  - (8) Ensure that appropriate manning is available to provide the type of service declared taking into account the guidance issued by the Competent Authority for VTS;
  - (9) Ensure that equipment appropriate to the type of service declared is available, taking into account the guidance issued by the Competent Authority for VTS;
  - (10) Ensure that VTS personnel are vested with the appropriate authority and / or delegations required to fulfil their duties;
  - (11) Audit and review the performance of Port VTSs in accordance with the Port Marine Safety Code, recommending and facilitating improvements where necessary.

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<sup>3</sup> SOLAS Chapter V, Regulation 12 (1)

## **PROMULGATION OF DETAILS AND TYPES OF SERVICE**

### **1 Details**

As a minimum, the following information should be promulgated where a VTS / Port Information is provided:

- (1) Type of service (Port Information / VTS);
- (2) Category of VTS (Information Service / Navigational Assistance Service / Traffic Organisation Service);
- (3) Contact details and VTS / Port Information callsign;
- (4) Details of service to be provided;
- (5) Areas of coverage;
- (6) Hours of service;
- (7) Categories of vessel required, expected or encouraged to participate;
- (8) VHF Radio frequencies;
- (9) Reporting points;
- (10) Format and content of reports required.

### **2 Publications**

Statutory Harbour Authorities should provide the details above to the MCA, who are the UK's Competent Authority for VTS, for compilation of the UK VTS database and to UKHO for promulgation of appropriate details in the Admiralty List of Radio Signals Volume 6 and on Admiralty Chart(s).

Ports with VTS services are encouraged to provide details to IALA for promulgation on the World VTS Guide website.

**NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES & LEGISLATION**

The following documents provide the framework for VTS Operations:

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| International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS V, 2002) – Regulation 12 | Vessel Traffic Services. Came into force on 1 July 2002  |
| IMO Resolution A.857(20)   | Guidelines for Vessel Traffic Services. Adopted on 27 November 1997.   |
| IALA VTS Manual 2002   |  |
| IALA Recommendation V-103  | Standards for Training and Certification of VTS Personnel. May 1998.   |
| IALA Recommendation V-119  | Implementation of Vessel Traffic Services. September 2000.   |
| IALA Guidelines on Risk Management   | Published December 2000.   |
| Harbours Act 1964  |  |
| Harbours Act (Northern Ireland) 1970   |  |
| Port Marine Safety Code  | Published March 2000.  |
| Guide to Good Practice   | Supplementary information concerning the Port Marine Safety Code, published March 2002.  |
| Acts, Orders and Byelaws pertaining to individual Ports                                |  |
| Resolution A.918 (20)  | Standard Marine Communication Phrases. November 2001.  |
| Resolution A.851 (20)  | General principles for ship reporting systems and ship reporting requirements, including guidelines for reporting incidents involving dangerous goods, harmful substances and / or marine pollutants. November 1997. |
| MSC/Circular 952   | IALA Standards for training and certification of Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) personnel. Adopted May 2000.  |

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File Ref: MNA 139/016/0002

Published: February 2003

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Department for  
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