



Gibraltar Maritime Administration

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Life-Saving Appliances - Recognised Distress Signals and Advertised Alternatives to Pyrotechnic Flares

To: Ship Owners, Operators, Master's, Certifying Authorities, and Recognised Organisations

References:

- SOLAS
- COLREGS
- Marine Equipment Directive 2014/90/EU (MED)

The Gibraltar Maritime Administration is aware of the development and marketing of hand-held non-pyrotechnic devices offered as alternatives to pyrotechnic flares; these will be referred to in this document as Electronic Visual Distress Signals (EVDS), which covers an array of different devices. While these devices have a number of potential uses, from a practical and search and rescue perspective the light signal they produce is different to that produced by a pyrotechnic flare, and may not be recognised as a distress signal. This could lead to fatal consequences.

To be effective, distress signals need to be internationally recognised. Not all EVDS provide a distress signal listed in COLREGS Annex IV (such as SOS), and currently there is no knowledge of any EVDS device compliant with the SOLAS technical performance standards for distress alerting equipment. Consequently, the international carriage requirements do not recognise EVDS.

For commercial vessels required to carry flares, any hand-held distress flares carried must meet the requirements of the Marine Equipment Directive (demonstrated by the presence of the Wheel Mark), which incorporates European and IMO requirements. Gibraltar Maritime Administration is not aware of any EVDS product which meets the light intensity required by the IMO for distress flares. This means that if your commercial vessel is required to carry flares, they cannot be an EVDS product.

For vessels where the carriage of flares is not mandatory, it is advised that EVDS should not currently be carried as a substitute for conventional pyrotechnic flares. This is due to the risk that EVDS may not be recognised internationally as a distress signal.

Steve Gomez – Chief Surveyor (Ag)

For & on behalf of the Maritime Administrator

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