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Shipping Guidance Notice – 178

MGN 35 (M+F) - Accidents When Using Power Operated Watertight Doors

To: Masters, Officers, Crew, Owners, & Operators

1. References

- *MGN 35 (M+F) - Accidents When Using Power Operated Watertight Doors*

2. Introduction

1.1. The purpose of this Shipping Information Notice (SIN) is to bring to the attention of relevant stakeholders, the publication of UK MGN 35 (M+F), currently at amendment 3.

1.2. MGN 35 (M+F) aims to reduce the risk of injury to personnel passing through watertight doors, and provides guidance on the safe use and operation of power operated watertight doors on ships.

1.3. MGN 35 (M+F) is accessible via https://www.gov.uk/transport/maritime-and-shipping and is additionally appended to this SIN.

2. Application

2.1. Masters, officers, crew, and operators of Gibraltar registered vessels should review and familiarise themselves with the guidance contained within MGN 35 (M+F) as may be amended.

2.2. The guidance contained within MGN 35 (M+F) should be made use of in relation to associated risk assessments and procedures within the vessel's safety management systems (SMS) irrespective if the SMS is mandatory under SOLAS Chapter IX or otherwise.

Steve Gomez - Chief Surveyor
For & on behalf of the Maritime Administrator

Issue date: 28 October 2026

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Statutory guidance

MGN 35 (M+F) Amendment 3 Accidents When Using Power Operated Watertight Doors

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Summary

This notice provides information on the safe use and operation of power operated watertight doors on ships.

- the procedure when passing through power operated watertight doors
- the procedures when carrying loads through power operated watertight doors, and
- initial and continuation of training in the safe use of power operated watertight doors.

The code of safe working practices for merchant seafarers (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-safe-working-practices-for-merchant-seafarers-2026-edition), chapter 11.6 provides additional information on the operation of watertight doors according to the ship's class (A,B,C or D).

Amendment 3 updates references only.

1. Operating Watertight Doors

1.1 Lives have been lost and serious injuries caused by the incorrect operation of power operated watertight doors.

1.2 In order to reduce the risk of injury to personnel passing through watertight doors some ships have central control units located on the navigating bridge which have two operating positions, one marked "local control" and the other "doors closed". Under normal conditions and potentially hazardous situations the operating condition is set to "local control". The "doors closed" position is only used in emergencies and for drill or testing periods.

1.3 When the bridge central control unit is set at "local control", any watertight door can be locally opened and locally closed without automatic closure of the door. Since closure of the door requires deliberate action the risk of a person being trapped is very much reduced.

1.4 The “doors closed” mode will also permit doors to be opened locally, but the doors automatically close upon release of the local control mechanism.

1.5 Accidents have occurred when crew members were using the controls provided at the doors to pass through watertight doors which had been closed from the navigating bridge. Under these circumstances if the control at the door is released the door closes automatically with a force sufficient to injure anyone caught in its path.

2. Procedures

2.1 It is essential therefore that when using a watertight door which has been closed, irrespective of the mode of closure, that both the local controls – one on each side of the bulkhead – are held in the “open” position while passing through the door. That can be done by first fully opening the door using the nearside control with one hand, reaching through the opening to the control on the far side and using the far side control to keep the door fully open until passage is complete.

2.2 A person, when unaccompanied, must have both hands free to operate the controls and should never attempt to carry any load through unassisted. Accordingly, supervision should be exercised over any work requiring movement of tools, parts or materials through a door. This will effectively make it a two-man operation - one man to operate the door and another to carry the load.

2.3 To avoid potentially fatal slips, the accumulation of oil leakage in the vicinity of the watertight doors should not be permitted.

2.4 Written instructions need to be provided for the ship on the safe operation of the doors and it is essential that all crew members who may use the doors:

a) know what type of control system is fitted;

b) are well trained in the correct operating procedure for the system; and

c) fully appreciate the crushing power of watertight doors.

2.5 This crushing power, together with expeditious closing, is necessary to ensure that watertight doors fulfil their primary purpose of ensuring maximum safety of the ship and its crew but if accidents to personnel are to be avoided it is essential that the operating instructions are strictly observed. Permanent notices clearly stating the correct operating procedure must be prominently displayed on both sides of every watertight door.

3. Training

3.1 Under health & safety legislation it is required that on all seagoing vessels fitted with power operated watertight doors there are procedures for training personnel in there use when joining a vessel. Also that training is repeated at regular intervals in order to remind personnel of the dangers of these doors.

3.2 For Passenger Ships attention is drawn to Merchant Shipping (Passenger Ship Construction: Ships of Classes I, II and II(A)) Regulations 1998 and Merchant Shipping (Passenger Ship Construction: Ships of Classes III to VI(A)) Regulations 1998.

3.3 Attention is also drawn to MGN 71(M) Amendment 1 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mgn-71-mf-amendment-1-musters-drills-on-board-training-and-instructions-and-decision-support-systems) section 8.

3.4 Records of training should be kept as part of the vessels Safety Management System for inspection at a later date.

3.5 Under the International Safety Management Code ship owners and managers are required to establish safeguards against all identified risks (para 1.2.2.2) and to investigate and analyse non-conformities, accidents and hazardous situations (para 9.1). Then to ensure that training is provided for all personnel concerned (para 6.5). Documentation of such training is kept in accordance with section 11 of the Code. They should also take into account guidelines, etc. recommended by Administrations (para 1.2.3.2).

More information

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Please note that all addresses and telephone numbers are correct at time of publishing.

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