



Technical Bulletin

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Automatic Identification Systems (AIS)

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The fitting of Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) aboard ship was intended to assist watchkeeping officers. AIS is designed to be capable of providing information about the ship to coastal authorities and information between ships.



Typical AIS

Regulation 19 of SOLAS Chapter V requires AIS to be fitted aboard all ships of 300 gross tonnage and upwards engaged on international voyages. Cargo ships of 500 gross tonnage and upwards not engaged

on international voyages and all passenger ships irrespective of size. This requirement became effective for all ships on 31 December 2004.

It is a requirement that ships fitted with AIS should maintain the equipment in operation at all times and basic information must be entered into the equipment. This includes the ship's identity, type, position, course, speed, next port, eta and other navigational status. This information is required by Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) to manage ships in areas of high density traffic and for coordinating search and rescue operations by shore search and rescue facilities. The AIS information received by VTS is also used for accident investigation.

Club inspectors have noted that a number of ships are not updating the information or are entering the wrong information in the AIS. Common oversights include not listing the ships stoppage at bunker ports, incorrect destination and eta, failing to enter the ship arrival or departure from a port. This inaccurate information may have a detrimental effect on the safety of vessel and hinder search and rescue operations.

Piracy

Piracy has become a major problem in certain parts of the World and there are different views on whether the AIS should be switched on or off during the time the ship is in a high risk area. It is recognised that the

master may exercise his discretion and switch the AIS off, if after a full and detailed risk assessment, he considers the safety of his ship and personnel on board are at risk.

However if the AIS is switched off, it will be very difficult for the international naval forces to identify, track and monitor his ship while transiting the high risk areas.

It is suggested in the OCIMF handbook : '*Piracy – The East Africa Somalia Situation*' that the AIS should be left on, but the amount of information be restricted to the ships identity, type, position, course, speed and other safety related information which may be of use to the naval forces in the event of an attack. Further guidance for ships transiting pirate waters can be obtained from The UK P&I Club website '*Piracy – Precautions and defences*'.

