

March 18, 2003

MR'S ADVISORY TO SHIPPING No. A-05-2003

TO : ALL STEAMSHIP AGENTS, OWNERS, AND OPERATORS

SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTATION OF AIS IN THE PANAMA CANAL

1. Effective July 1, 2003, the Panama Canal Authority will implement mandatory carriage of Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) in Panama Canal waters. In order to be accepted for transit through the Panama Canal, all vessels over 300 gross tons or over 20 meters LOA must be equipped with an AIS transponder that meets the standards set by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). With regard to combined and multiple units (tug-and-tows), only the Tug will be required to be equipped with an AIS transponder.
2. Following Regulation 19, Chapter V of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS 74), as amended by the Diplomatic Conference held last December, all vessels will be required to carry onboard AIS systems, effective on the date of the first safety equipment survey between July 1, 2004 and December 31, 2004.
3. Between July 1, 2003 and the dates set above, as a temporary measure for those vessels not yet carrying AIS, the Panama Canal will provide AIS ready vessel tracking portable units for a nominal rental fee of \$150.00 U.S.
4. Shipboard AIS transponders shall comply with the following requirements:
 - a. The AIS system installed onboard ships shall be Class A AIS shipborne equipment according to IMO MSC 74 (69) Annex 3, "*Recommendation on Performance Standards for a Universal Shipborne Automatic Identification Systems (AIS)*", as amended.
 - b. The AIS equipment shall be type-approved according to standard IEC 61993-2. The Panama Canal Authority may require presentation of the type approval document. Some transponders have old firmware versions, which will not function properly. The make and model of these units however, may be the same as those of the newer type-approved version. Normally this condition can be corrected by installation of a newer firmware version in the AIS equipment and obtaining the type approval papers.



- c. The AIS equipment shall be installed according to IMO "*Guidelines for Installation of Shipborne Automatic Identification System (AIS)*", including the installation of a Pilot Plug. The Pilot Plug shall be close to conning position No. 1 in the navigation bridge. This plug shall be labeled "AIS PILOT PLUG", and shall have nearby a USA standard (NEMA 5-15R) 120V, AC, 3-prong power receptacle, to provide power to the pilot's laptop computer. This receptacle shall be connected to emergency power.

5. The Panama Canal Authority has been observing the signals sent by ships already fitted with AIS. Some of these signals reveal deficiencies, which would make them unusable for transiting the Panama Canal. The most common deficiencies found so far are:
 - a. Ship's static data is loaded incorrectly or not present at all. For example, we have seen ships reporting dimensions that are obviously incorrect.
 - b. Some ships are not transmitting heading information. The connection of the ship's gyro to the AIS is required.
 - c. Some shipborne equipment does not respond to shore station commands, especially AIS Message 16, which is the "Assigned Mode" command. The cause is probably outdated firmware.

6. Experience has shown that harnessing today's leading-edge maritime technology reaps a rich harvest of benefits. The Panama Canal Authority has participated extensively in AIS discussions at the IMO, as well as in the technical meetings at IEC and IALA. Shoreside AIS stations have been in place for testing since May 2002. The benefits of this satellite-based vessel navigation aid for commercial vessels will apply to all Panama Canal users. Reduced delays, improved safety, increased security and better logistical management of ship, canal, and dock assets are just some of the benefits of this system, which will generate improvements in efficiency in an increasingly cost-conscious world.

ORIGINAL SIGNED

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