ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

MARITIME ADMINISTRATION

CIRCULAR N° SOL 078

REVISED IMO GUIDELINES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION, INSTALLATION, MAINTENANCE AND INSPECTION/SURVEY OF MEANS OF EMBARKATION AND DISEMBARKATION

(MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1)

TO: **SHIPOWNERS, SHIP MANAGERS, MASTERS, RECOGNIZED ORGANIZATIONS, SHIPBUILDERS AND MANUFACTURERS**

APPLICABLE TO: All ships subject to SOLAS, Chapter II-1

EFFECTIVE AS FROM: 1 July 2026

Date: 2 February 2026

The IMO has adopted MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1, revising guidelines for the construction, installation, maintenance, and inspection of means of embarkation and disembarkation, effective 1 July 2026. Key updates include stricter safety requirements for rigging, such as mandatory life jackets and harnesses, new side-net options, and updated ISO standards for equipment to reduce risks.

Key aspects of the revised guidelines (MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1) are as follows:

1. Applicability
The provisions of this Circular apply to ships constructed on or after 1 January 2010 with respect to construction and installation requirements. The provisions related to maintenance and inspection apply to all ships, irrespective of date of construction**.**

2.Safety Measures
When rigging the accommodation ladder, gangway, and associated safety nets, crew members shall wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including life jackets and safety harnesses.

3.Safety Nets and Side Nets
The revised guidelines introduce the option of using side nets fitted to accommodation ladders as an alternative to a conventional safety net. A safety net is not required where the risk of falling through the sides of the means of embarkation and disembarkation is effectively mitigated by a rigid top railing of not less than 1 metre in height, and where a side net is rigged between the railing and the base of the accommodation ladder, including the upper and lower platforms.

All safety nets and/or side nets shall be subject to regular inspection and maintenance and shall be replaced when found to be defective or no longer fit for purpose. When not in use, nets shall be properly stowed in well-ventilated spaces and protected from exposure to direct sunlight and chemical contamination.

4.Design Standards
Updated ISO standards are required as per the table below:

Installation Date of equipment	Ship Construction Date	Recommended Construction Standard	Equipment
Before 1 July 2026	On or after 1 January 2010	ISO 5488:1979	Accommodation ladders
		ISO 7061:1993	Aluminium shore gangways
		ISO 7364:1983	Accommodation ladder winches
On or after 1 July 2026	On or after 1 January 2010	ISO 5488:2015	Accommodation ladders
		ISO 7061:2015 or 2024	Aluminium shore gangways
		ISO 7364:2016	Accommodation ladder winches
On or after 1 July 2026	Before 1 January 2010	*ISO 5488:1979 or 2015	Accommodation ladders
		*ISO 7061:1993, 2015 or 2024	Aluminium shore gangways
		*ISO 7364:1983 or 2016	Accommodation ladder winches
* If reasonable and practicable			

4.1Handling the Principle of "Reasonable and Practicable"
It is recognised that full compliance may not always be possible due to the ship's design, structure, or operational limitations. In such cases, the principle of "reasonable and practicable" may be accepted, provided that equivalent safety is demonstrated and risks are adequately addressed. Any alternative arrangement and compensating measures must be reviewed by the Recognised Organisation and authorised by the Administration. This acceptance is to be formally documented and kept in the vessel's technical records.

5.Examination and operational test during surveys required by SOLAS regulations 1/7 and 8
MSC.1/Circular.1331/Rev.1 provides clarification through amendments to the testing requirements for accommodation ladders, gangways and winches, as follows:

1. The five-yearly testing of accommodation ladders and gangways shall be carried out as a static test using the maximum working load.
2. In addition to the static load test, the winch of an accommodation ladder shall be functionally tested during the five-yearly examination by raising and lowering the accommodation ladder in an unloaded condition.
3. All tests shall be conducted with the ladder or gangway arranged in the horizontal position. During testing, the accommodation ladder shall be suspended by its wire(s) and supported by the winch.

6.Load testing guidance
For further guidance about load testing, please refer to MSC.1/Circular.1331/Rev.1 Section 5.3 "Tests".

7.Actions by the shipowners, ship operators, masters and officers
Shipowners, ship operators, masters, officers, shipbuilders and manufacturers are advised to ensure that the above guidelines are duly observed, as applicable.

Annexes to this circular:

- MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1

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MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1
28 August 2025

REVISED GUIDELINES FOR CONSTRUCTION, INSTALLATION, MAINTENANCE AND INSPECTION/SURVEY OF MEANS OF EMBARKATION AND DISEMBARKATION

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its eighty-sixth session (27 May to 5 June 2009), approved the *Guidelines for construction, installation, maintenance and inspection/survey of means of embarkation and disembarkation* (MSC.1/Circ.1331), prepared by the Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Equipment at its fifty-second session, with a view to providing specific guidance on the construction, installation, maintenance and inspection/survey of means of embarkation and disembarkation such as accommodation ladders and gangways required under SOLAS regulation II-1/3-9.

2 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its 110th session (18 to 27 June 2025) approved amendments to MSC.1/Circ.1331, prepared by the Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Construction, at its eleventh session, as set out in the annex.

3 Member Governments are invited to bring the attached Revised Guidelines to the attention of shipowners, shipbuilders, designers, manufacturers, port State control authorities and other parties concerned in conjunction with SOLAS regulation II-1/3-9 (Means of embarkation on and disembarkation from ships).

4 The present circular supersedes MSC.1/Circ.1331.

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ANNEX

REVISED GUIDELINES FOR CONSTRUCTION, INSTALLATION, MAINTENANCE AND INSPECTION/SURVEY OF MEANS OF EMBARKATION AND DISEMBARKATION

1 APPLICATION AND DEFINITIONS

1.1 This document is intended to provide Guidelines for the construction, installation, maintenance and inspection/survey of means of embarkation and disembarkation required under SOLAS regulation II-1/3-9, adopted by resolution MSC.256(84). Where means of embarkation and disembarkation other than those specifically covered by these Guidelines are fitted, an equivalent level of safety should be provided.

1.2 Unless expressly provided otherwise, the expression "installed on or after 1 July 2026" in these Guidelines means:

(a) for ships for which the building contract is placed on or after 1 July 2026, or in the absence of the contract, the keels of which are laid or which are at a similar stage of construction on or after 1 July 2026, any installation date on the ship; or

(b) for ships other than those ships prescribed in (a) above, a contractual delivery date for the equipment or, in the absence of a contractual delivery date, the actual delivery date of the equipment to the ship on or after 1 July 2026.

1.3 For the purpose of these Guidelines, a "safety net" is a net which is rigged between the ship's side and the means of (dis)embarkation to prevent a person from falling into the water or onto the quayside from a means of (dis)embarkation.

2 CONSTRUCTION

2.1 Accommodation ladders and gangways for means of embarkation and disembarkation which are installed before 1 July 2026 on board ships constructed on or after 1 January 2010 should meet applicable international standards such as ISO 5488:1979, *Shipbuilding – Accommodation ladders*, ISO 7061:1993, *Shipbuilding – Aluminium shore gangways for seagoing vessels* and/or national standards and/or other requirements recognized by the Administration.

2.2 Accommodation ladders and gangways for means of embarkation and disembarkation which are installed on ships constructed on or after 1 January 2010, which are installed on or after 1 July 2026, should meet applicable international standards such as ISO 5488:2015, *Ships and marine technology – Accommodation ladders*, ISO 7061:2015 or ISO 7061:2024*, Ships and marine technology – Aluminium shore gangways for seagoing vessels* and/or national standards and/or other requirements recognized by the Administration.

2.3 Accommodation ladders and gangways installed on ships constructed before 1 January 2010, which are installed on or after 1 July 2026, should meet applicable international standards insofar as is reasonable and practicable, such as ISO 5488:1979, *Shipbuilding – Accommodation ladders*, or ISO 5488:2015, *Ships and marine technology – Accommodation ladders*, ISO 7061:1993, ISO 7061:2015 or ISO 7061:2024, *Ships and marine technology – Aluminium shore gangways for seagoing vessels* and/or national standards and/or other requirements recognized by the Administration.

2.4 The construction and test of accommodation ladder winches which are installed before 1 July 2026 on board ships constructed on or after 1 January 2010 should be in accordance with applicable international standards, such as ISO 7364:1983 *Shipbuilding and marine structures – Deck machinery – Accommodation ladder winches.*

2.5 The construction and test of accommodation ladder winches which are installed on or after 1 July 2026 on board ships constructed on or after 1 January 2010 should be in accordance with applicable international standards such as ISO 7364:2016 *Ships and marine technology – Deck machinery – Accommodation ladder winches*.

2.6 The construction and test of accommodation ladder winches installed on ships constructed before 1 January 2010, which are installed on or after 1 July 2026, should be in accordance with applicable international standards insofar as is reasonable and practicable, such as ISO 7364:1983, *Shipbuilding and marine structures – Deck machinery – Accommodation ladder winches*, or ISO 7364:2016 *Ships and marine technology – Deck machinery – Accommodation ladder winches*.

2.7 The structure of the accommodation ladders and gangways and their fittings and attachments should be such as to allow regular inspection, maintenance of all parts and, if necessary, lubrication of their pivot pin. Special care should be taken to ensure that the welding connection works are properly performed.

3 INSTALLATION

3.1 Location

As far as practicable, the means of embarkation and disembarkation should be sited clear of the working area and should not be placed where cargo or other suspended loads may pass overhead.

3.2 Lighting

Adequate lighting should be provided to illuminate the means of embarkation and disembarkation, the position on deck where persons embark or disembark and the controls of the arrangement.

3.3 Lifebuoy

A lifebuoy equipped with a self-igniting light and a buoyant lifeline should be available for immediate use in the vicinity of the embarkation and disembarkation arrangement when in use.

3.4 Arrangement

3.4.1 Each accommodation ladder should be of such a length to ensure that, at a maximum design operating angle of inclination, the lowest platform will be not more than 600 mm above the waterline in the lightest seagoing condition, as defined in SOLAS regulation III/3.13.

3.4.2 The arrangement at the head of the accommodation ladder should provide direct access between the ladder and the ship's deck by a platform securely guarded by handrails and adequate handholds. The ladder should be securely attached to the ship to prevent overturning.

3.4.3 For ships on which the height of the embarkation/disembarkation deck exceeds 20 m above the waterline specified in paragraph 3.4.1 and on other ships for which the Administration considers compliance with the provisions of paragraph 3.4.1 impractical, an alternative means of providing safe access to the ship or supplementary means of safe access to the bottom platform of the accommodation ladder may be accepted.

3.5 Marking

Each accommodation ladder or gangway should be clearly marked at each end with a plate showing the restrictions on the safe operation and loading, including the maximum and minimum permitted design angles of inclination, design load, maximum load on bottom end plate, etc. Where the maximum operational load is less than the design load, it should also be shown on the marking plate.

3.6 Test

3.6.1 After installation, the winch and the accommodation ladder should be operationally tested to confirm proper operation and condition of the winch and the ladder after the test.

3.6.2 The winch should be tested as a part of the complete accommodation ladder unit through a minimum of two times hoisting and lowering of the accommodation ladder in accordance with the onboard test requirement specified in international standards applicable to the winch.

3.6.3 Every new accommodation ladder should be subjected to a static load test of the specified maximum working load upon installation.

3.7 Positioning

3.7.1 Gangways should not be used at an angle of inclination greater than 30° from the horizontal and accommodation ladders should not be used at an angle greater than 55° from the horizontal, unless designed and constructed for use at angles greater than these and marked as such, as required by paragraph 3.5.

3.7.2 Gangways should never be secured to a ship's guardrails unless they have been designed for that purpose. If positioned through an open section of bulwark or railings, any remaining gaps should be adequately fenced.

3.7.3 Adequate lighting for means of embarkation and disembarkation and the immediate approaches should be ensured from the ship and/or the shore in hours of darkness.

3.8 Rigging (safety net)

3.8.1 A safety net should be mounted in way of the accommodation ladders and gangways where it is possible that a person may fall from the means of embarkation and disembarkation or between the ship and quayside.

3.8.2 The safety net in 3.8.1 is not required if the provisions of 3.8.3 and 3.8.4 below are met.

3.8.3 The hazard of a person falling through the sides of the means of (dis)embarkation is adequately mitigated if the top railing is of rigid construction and a side net* has been rigged between this railing and the base of the accommodation ladder, including its upper and lower platforms, or the gangway (see figure 1).

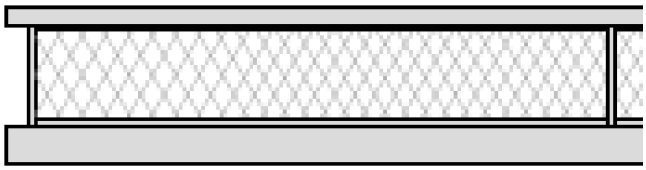

Figure 1: Side net between rigid top railing and base of ladder

3.8.4 The hazard of falling over the rigid top railing is adequately mitigated if this railing is installed in accordance with relevant international standards, at a height of not less than 1,000 mm.

3.9 Verification

Upon installation, the compliance of the entire arrangement with these Guidelines should be verified.

3.10 Protection of crew

When rigging the accommodation ladder, gangway and the safety net, the crew should have sufficient personal safety protection. The crew should wear life jackets and safety harnesses while rigging.

4 MAINTENANCE

4.1 Accommodation ladders and gangways, including associate winch and fittings, should be properly maintained and inspected at appropriate intervals as required by SOLAS regulation III/20.7.2, in accordance with manufacturers' instructions. Additional checks should be made each time the accommodation ladder and gangway is rigged, looking out for signs of distortion, cracks and corrosion. Close examination for possible corrosion should be carried out, especially when an aluminium accommodation ladder/gangway has fittings made of mild steel.

4.2 Bent stanchions should be replaced or repaired and guard ropes should be inspected for wear and renewed where necessary.

4.3 Moving parts should be free to turn and should be greased as appropriate.

4.4 The lifting equipment should be inspected, tested and maintained paying careful attention to the condition of the hoist wire. The wires used to support the means of embarkation and disembarkation should be renewed when necessary, as required by SOLAS regulation II-1/3-9.

* Refer to ISO 9554:2019, Fibre ropes – General specifications or other standards acceptable to the Administration.

4.5 Arrangements should also be made to examine the underside of gangways and accommodation ladders at regular intervals.

4.6 All inspections, maintenance work and repairs of accommodation ladders and gangways should be recorded in order to provide an accurate history for each appliance. The information to be recorded appropriately on board should include the date of the most recent inspection, the name of the person or body who carried out that inspection, the due date for the next inspection and the dates of renewal of wires used to support the embarkation and disembarkation arrangement.

4.7 The safety net and/or side net should be properly stored in ventilated places avoiding sunlight and chemical contamination. The safety net and/or side net should be checked and maintained regularly and replaced if found necessary.

5 EXAMINATION AND OPERATIONAL TEST DURING SURVEYS REQUIRED BY SOLAS REGULATIONS I/7 AND 8

5.1 Accommodation ladders/gangways and davits

5.1.1 *Accommodation ladder*

5.1.1.1 The following items should be thoroughly examined during annual surveys required by SOLAS regulations I/7 and 8 and checked for satisfactory condition of the accommodation ladder:

.1 steps;

.2 platforms;

.3 all support points such as pivots, rollers, etc.;

.4 all suspension points such as lugs, brackets, etc.;

.5 stanchions, safety pins, rigid handrails, hand ropes and turntables,side nets and their securing points;

.6 davit structure, wire and sheaves, etc.; and

.7 any other relevant provisions stated in these Guidelines.

5.1.1.2 At every five-yearly survey, upon completion of the examination required by paragraph 5.1.1.1, the accommodation ladder should be statically tested with the specified maximum working load of the ladder.

5.1.2 *Gangway*

5.1.2.1 The following items should be thoroughly examined during annual surveys required by SOLAS regulations I/7 and 8 and checked for satisfactory condition of the gangway:

.1 treads;

.2 side stringers, cross-members, decking, deck plates, etc.;

.3 all support points such as wheel, roller, etc.;

.4 stanchions, safety pins, rigid handrails, hand ropes; side nets and their securing points; and

.5 any other relevant provisions stated in these Guidelines.

5.1.2.2 At every five-yearly survey, upon completion of the examination required by paragraph 5.1.2.1, the gangway should be statically tested with the specified maximum working load of the gangway.

5.2 Winch

5.2.1 During annual surveys required by SOLAS regulations I/7 and 8, the following items should be examined for satisfactory condition:

.1 brake mechanism including condition of brake pads and band brake, if fitted;

.2 remote control system; and

.3 power supply system (motor).

5.2.2 At every five-yearly survey, upon completion of the examination required by paragraph 5.2.1, the winch should be operationally tested by raising and lowering the unloaded accommodation ladder.

5.3 Tests

5.3.1 The tests specified in sections 5.1 and 5.2 are for the purpose of confirming the proper operation of the accommodation ladder, gangway and/or winch, as appropriate.

5.3.2 The load used for the test should be:

.1 the design load; or

.2 the maximum operational load, if this is less than the design load and marked as per paragraph 3.5; or

.3 the load nominated by the shipowner or operator only in those cases where the design load or maximum operational load is not known (e.g. for accommodation ladders or gangways which are provided on board ships constructed prior to 1 January 2010), in which case that nominated load should be used as the maximum operational load for all purposes within these Guidelines.

5.3.3 The tests should be carried out with the load applied as uniformly as possible along the length of the accommodation ladder or gangway. The ladder or gangway should be in horizontal position, and the accommodation ladder should be suspended by the wire(s) and supported by the winch.

5.3.4 Following satisfactory completion of the applicable test(s) without permanent deformation or damage to the tested item, the load used for that test should be marked as the maximum operational load in accordance with paragraph 3.5.

5.4 Fittings and davits

During annual surveys required by SOLAS regulations I/7 and 8, all fittings and davits on the ship's deck associated with accommodation ladders and gangways should be examined for satisfactory condition.

5.5 Means of access to deck

During annual surveys required by SOLAS regulations I/7 and 8, the fittings or structures for means of access to decks such as handholds in a gateway or bulwark ladder and stanchions should be examined for satisfactory condition.

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