



Antigua and Barbuda Maritime Administration

SOLAS Circular
No. 2026-001
14 March 2026

SUBJECT: Pilot Ladders – Construction, Certification, Inspection and Service Life

REFERENCE:

- a) *SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 23*
- b) *IMO Resolution A.1045(27) - as amended by Resolution A.1108(29)*
- c) *MSC.1/Circ.1428/Rev.1*
- d) *IMO Resolution MSC.576(110)*
- e) *IMO Resolution MSC.572(110)*
- f) *ISO 799-1:2019 – Ships and Marine Technology – Pilot Ladders*

TO: Ship-owners, operators, masters and officers of Antigua and Barbuda flagged ships, and Recognized Organizations.

1. PURPOSE

This Circular provides guidance on the construction, certification, rigging, inspection, and service life of pilot ladders carried on board Antigua and Barbuda flagged vessels in accordance with the requirements of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and relevant International Maritime Organization (IMO) instruments.

The Circular also highlights common Port State Control (PSC) deficiencies associated with pilot ladders and provides recommended inspection practices to assist shipowners, operators, masters, and Recognized Organizations in ensuring compliance and safe pilot transfer operations.

2. APPLICATION

This Circular applies to all Antigua and Barbuda flagged ships required to provide pilot transfer arrangements in accordance with reference (a).

3. BACKGROUND

Safe pilot transfer arrangements remain a critical maritime safety issue. Incidents involving defective or improperly rigged pilot ladders continue to be reported to the IMO and to regional Port State Control regimes.

Reference (a) establishes mandatory requirements for pilot transfer arrangements on board ships. Guidance and recommended practices for the design, construction, rigging and use of pilot transfer arrangements are provided in reference (b). Illustrations of compliant pilot ladder arrangements are provided in reference (c).

Amendments to reference (a) adopted through reference (e) introduce additional requirements for pilot ladders. Defined service life limitations and other safety provisions are adopted through reference (d). These amendments will enter into force on 1 January 2028.

4. OBLIGATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Construction and Certification

1. Pilot ladders and associated equipment carried on board ships shall comply with the requirements of SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 23 and the performance standards for pilot transfer arrangements adopted by the International Maritime Organization.
2. Pilot ladders should be designed, manufactured, tested and approved in accordance with IMO Resolution MSC.576(110) and the relevant international standards referenced therein, including ISO 799-1:2019 - Ships and Marine Technology - Pilot Ladders.
3. Pilot ladders shall be provided with the markings, identification and documentation required by the applicable IMO performance standards and international construction standards.

2. Rigging and safe use

1. Pilot ladders shall be rigged and used in accordance with the requirements of SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 23 and the applicable IMO performance standards.
2. Guidance on the correct rigging and arrangement of pilot transfer equipment is provided in:
 1. IMO Resolution A.1045(27), as amended
 2. MSC.1/Circ.1428/Rev.1, which provides illustrated guidance for pilot transfer arrangements
3. Ship personnel shall ensure that pilot ladders and associated equipment are rigged and secured in accordance with these instruments prior to pilot embarkation or disembarkation.

3. Inspection and maintenance

1. Pilot ladders and associated equipment shall be maintained and inspected in accordance with the requirements of:
 1. SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 23, and
 2. IMO Resolution MSC.576(110).
2. Inspection, maintenance and record-keeping arrangements should be incorporated into the vessel's planned maintenance system (PMS) in accordance with the International Safety Management (ISM) Code.
3. Pilot ladders should be examined prior to use and periodically inspected in accordance with the intervals and procedures specified in the applicable IMO performance standards and manufacturer's instructions.
4. Any pilot ladder found to be damaged or otherwise unsuitable for safe use shall be removed from service.

4. Strength testing

1. Where pilot ladders remain in service under standards applicable prior to the entry into force of the IMO amendments referenced in section 8 of this Circular, strength testing should be conducted in accordance with the applicable international construction standard, including ISO 799-1:2019, or the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Records of any testing carried out should be retained on board and made available for verification during surveys and Port State Control inspections.

5. Service life requirements (from 1 January 2028)

1. Amendments to SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 23, adopted by IMO Resolution MSC.572(110), together with the performance standards adopted by IMO Resolution MSC.576(110), introduce additional requirements relating to pilot ladders and associated equipment.
2. From 1 January 2028, pilot ladders and manropes shall be used, maintained and replaced in accordance with the requirements specified in these instruments, including the mandatory service life limitations established by the IMO performance standards.
3. Shipowners and operators are encouraged to review procurement, maintenance and replacement practices in advance of the entry into force of these requirements to ensure timely compliance.

6. Common port state control deficiencies

1. Port State Control inspections frequently identify deficiencies related to pilot ladders, including:
 1. Missing manufacturer certificates
 2. Worn or damaged side ropes
 3. Improper rigging arrangements
 4. Steps not remaining horizontal
 5. Missing or incorrectly positioned spreaders
 6. Pilot ladders secured incorrectly
 7. Ladder resting against ship structures or obstructions
 8. Slippery or contaminated steps
 9. Incorrectly rigged combination ladder arrangements
2. Such deficiencies may result in Port State Control detention of the vessel.

7. Recommended shipboard checks

1. Prior to pilot embarkation or disembarkation, ship personnel should verify that:
 1. Manufacturer certificate is available
 2. Ladder identification markings are visible
 3. Side ropes are in good condition
 4. Steps are undamaged and evenly spaced
 5. Spreaders are correctly fitted
 6. Ladder is secured to strong points on deck
 7. Ladder is clear of discharge outlets and obstructions
 8. Combination ladder arrangements are correctly rigged
 9. Adequate lighting is provided at the transfer point

8. Action required

1. Shipowners, operators, masters, and Recognized Organizations acting on behalf of Antigua and Barbuda are requested to ensure that pilot ladders carried on board vessels are properly constructed, maintained, inspected and rigged in accordance with SOLAS requirements.
2. Particular attention should be given to pilot transfer arrangements during statutory surveys, safety inspections and prior to port arrivals where pilot boarding is required.

Issued by

Antigua and Barbuda
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