



GMDSS Distress procedures and alerts

URC23053 | 07 July 2023

Notice to: Ship Owners / Managers / Operators / Surveyors / Auditors / and firms engaged in inspection and testing of radio communication equipment.

This circular is issued to advise that the IMO Maritime Safety Committee's 106th session approved the revised:

- GMDSS operating guidance for ships in distress situations
- Procedures for responding to DSC distress alerts by ships and
- Guidance on distress alerts

The following IMO circulars, coming into force on 01 January 2024 contain advice and procedures to be followed, in accordance with chapter IV of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974:

- [MSC.1/Circ. 1656](#), provides guidance concerning the use of appropriate radiocommunications equipment in distress situations, in diagrammatic format.
- [MSC.1/Circ 1657](#) contains procedures to be followed by radio personnel onboard ships when responding to VHF, MF and HF distress alerts, and includes flow diagrams of the procedure
- [MSC.1./Circ 1658](#) describes the operating procedure for a distress alert in diagrammatic format

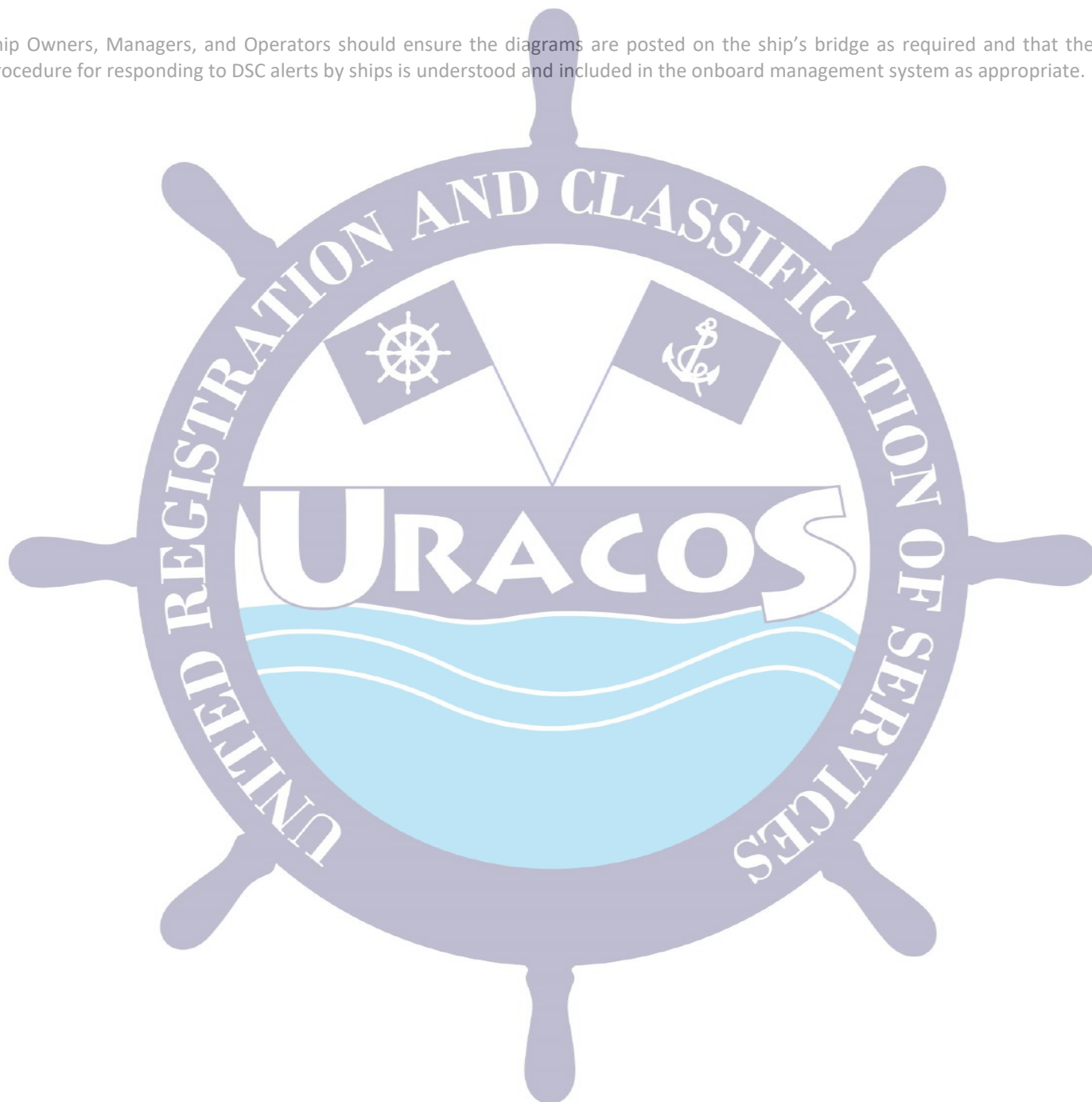
The diagrams, included in Annex to the circulars, are to be displayed on the bridge in A4 size. For easy reference these posters are reproduced herein.

Guidance for responding to DSC Distress Alerts by ships

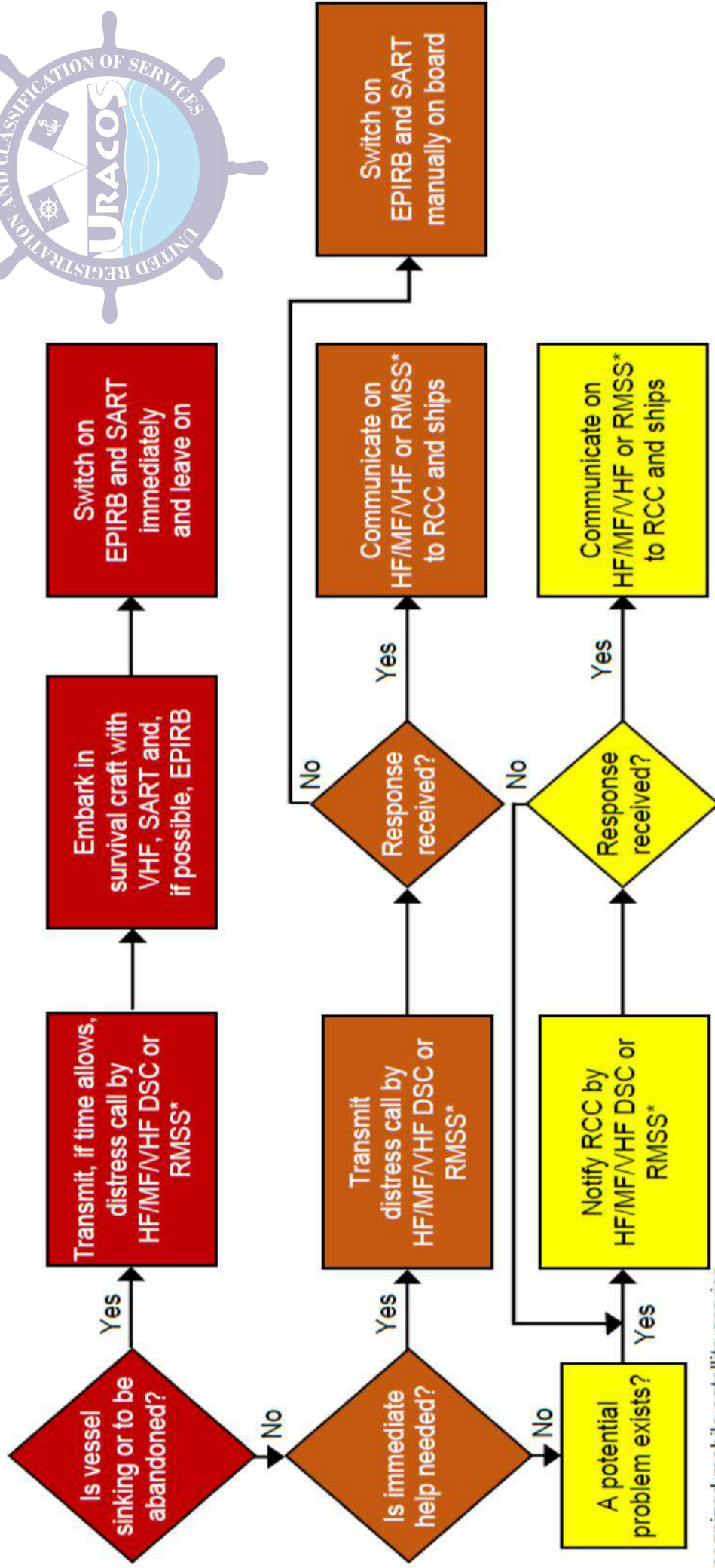
Circular 1657 additionally provides a procedure in text to be followed by radio personnel when responding to VHF, MF and HF distress alerts. The procedure covers distress relays, all coast station call (group calling), and authorisation.

[Act now](#)

Ship Owners, Managers, and Operators should ensure the diagrams are posted on the ship's bridge as required and that the procedure for responding to DSC alerts by ships is understood and included in the onboard management system as appropriate.



GMDSS OPERATING GUIDANCE FOR SHIPS IN DISTRESS SITUATIONS



* Recognized mobile satellite service

1. EPIRB should float free and activate automatically if it cannot be taken into survival craft.
2. Where necessary, ships should use any appropriate means to alert other ships.
3. Nothing above is intended to preclude the use of any and all available means of distress alerting, including those listed in COLREG 72, annex IV.

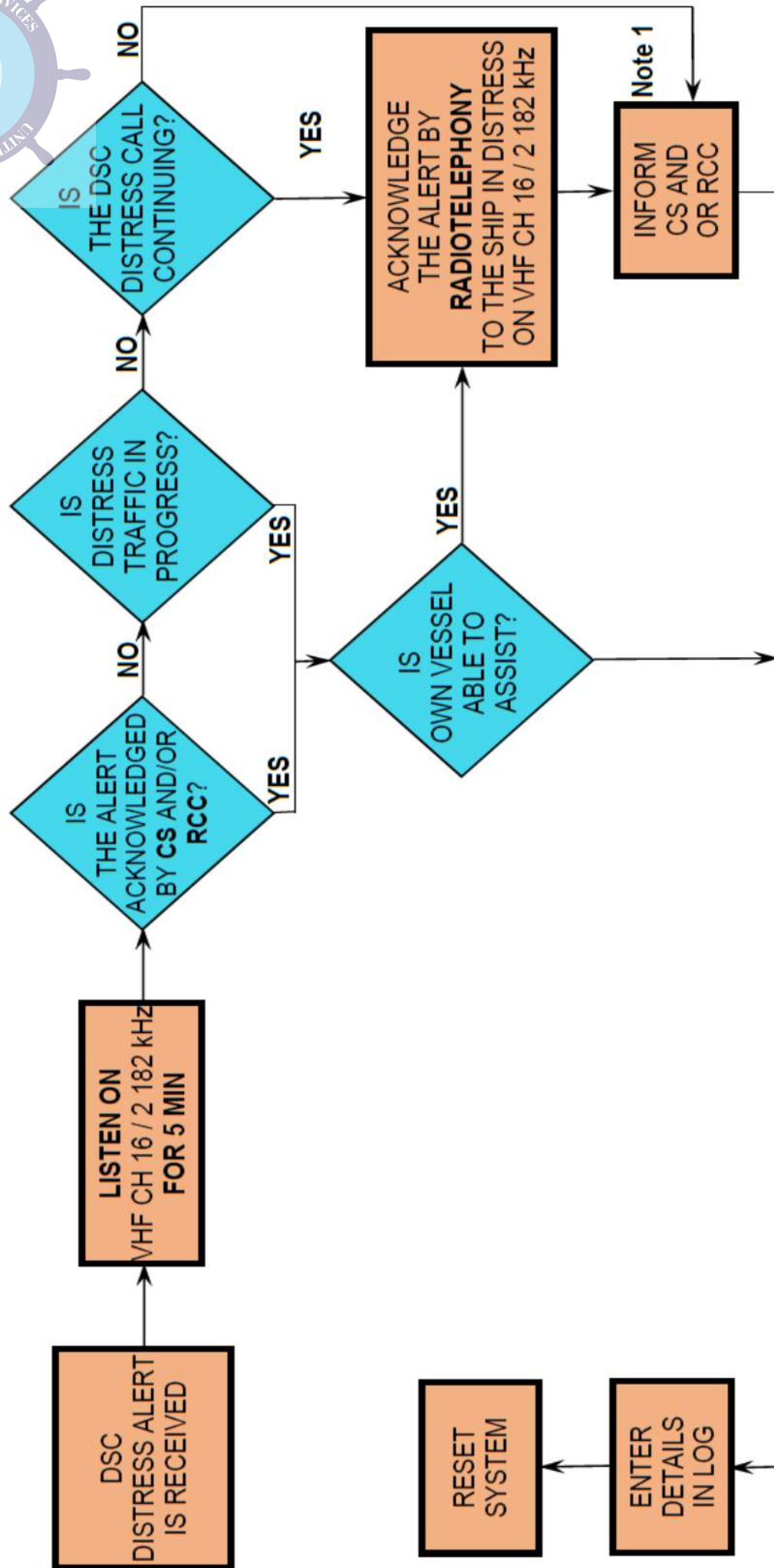
Frequencies for Distress Communications

Digital selective calling (DSC) Radiotelephone

	Digital selective calling (DSC)	Radiotelephone
VHF	Channel 70	Channel 16
MF	2 187.5 kHz	2 182 kHz
HF4	4 207.5 kHz	4 125 kHz
HF6	6 312.0 kHz	6 215 kHz
HF8	8 414.5 kHz	8 291 kHz
HF12	12 577.0 kHz	12 290 kHz
HF16	16 804.5 kHz	16 420 kHz

FLOW DIAGRAM 1

ACTIONS BY SHIPS UPON RECEPTION OF A VHF / MF DSC DISTRESS ALERT



REMARKS:

Note 1: Appropriate or relevant RCC and/or coastal station should be informed accordingly. If further DSC distress alerts are received from the same source and the ship in distress is beyond doubt in the vicinity, a DSC acknowledgement may, after consultation with an RCC or coastal station, be sent to terminate the call.

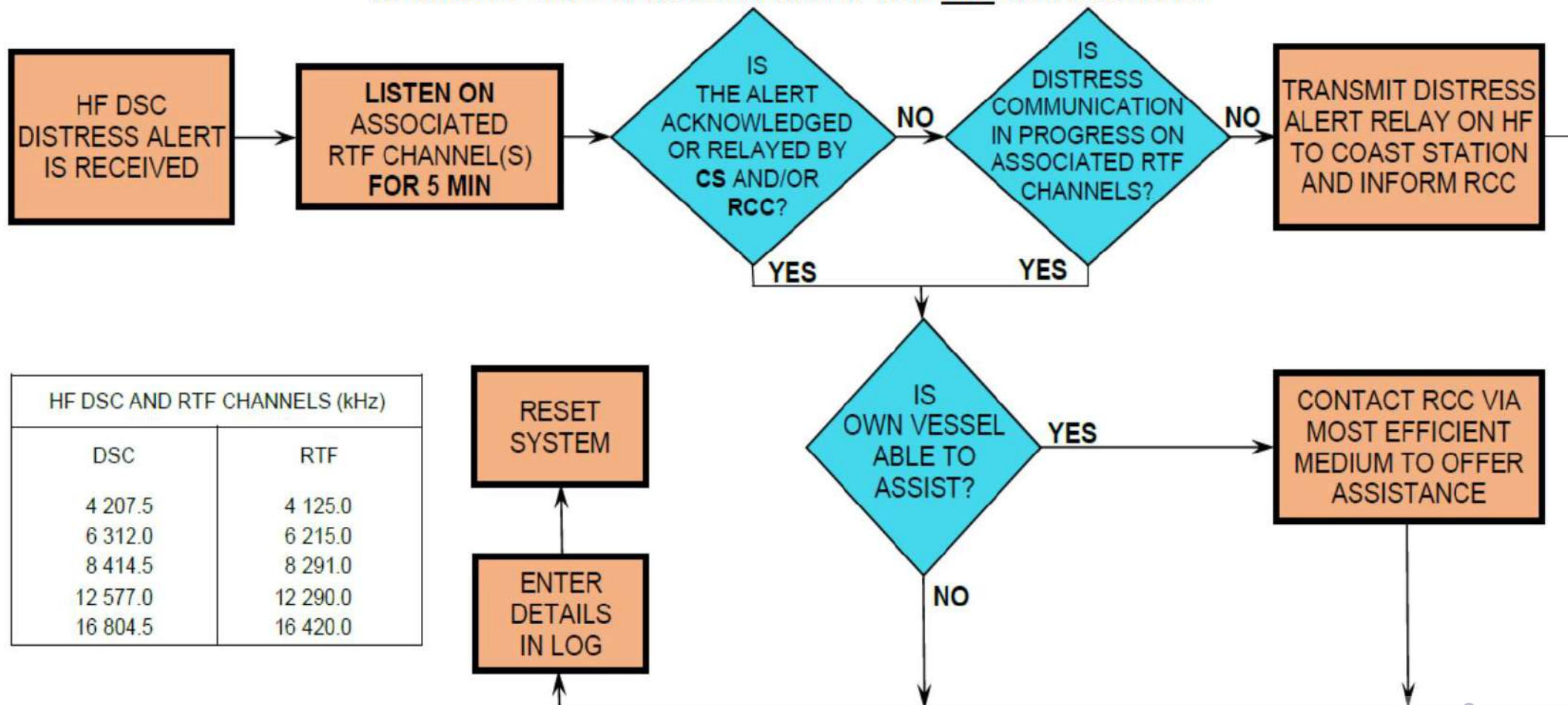
Note 2: In no case is a ship permitted to transmit a DSC distress alert relay on receipt of a DSC distress alert on either VHF channel 70 or MF channel 2 187.5 kHz.

CS = coastal station

RCC = rescue coordination centre

FLOW DIAGRAM 2

ACTIONS BY SHIPS UPON RECEPTION OF A HF DSC DISTRESS ALERT



HF DSC AND RTF CHANNELS (kHz)	
DSC	RTF
4 207.5	4 125.0
6 312.0	6 215.0
8 414.5	8 291.0
12 577.0	12 290.0
16 804.5	16 420.0

REMARKS:

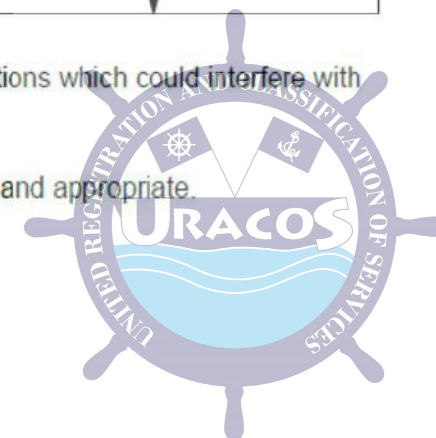
NOTE 1: If it is clear the ship or persons in distress are not in the vicinity and/or other crafts are better placed to assist, superfluous communications which could interfere with search and rescue activities are to be avoided. Details should be recorded in the appropriate logbook.

NOTE 2: The ship should establish communications with the station controlling the distress as directed and render such assistance as required and appropriate.

NOTE 3: Distress alert relays should be initiated manually.

CS = coastal station

RCC = rescue coordination centre



GUIDANCE ON DISTRESS ALERTS



LIFT COVER

**PRESS
RED
BUTTON**

until
acoustic and
light-indication
becomes steady
(more than 3 seconds)



Use the **HANDSET** for voice calling

MAYDAY-MAYDAY-MAYDAY

THIS IS

NAME – NAME – NAME

CALL SIGN
or other **IDENTIFICATION**

MMSI
(if the initial alert is sent by DSC)

OWN ID

SHIP'S NAME: _____

CALL SIGN: _____

MMSI: _____

MAYDAY

NAME of the **VESSEL** in distress
CALL SIGN or the **IDENTIFICATION**
MMSI
(if the initial alert is sent by DSC)

POSITION

Given as **latitude and longitude**
or
If **latitude and longitude** are not known
or if the time is insufficient,
in relation to a known geographical location

NATURE of distress

Kind of **ASSISTANCE** required
Any other useful **INFORMATION**

DISTRESS and COMMUNICATION FREQUENCIES

	DSC	Radiotelephony
VHF	Channel 70	Channel 16
MF	2 187.5 kHz	2 182 kHz
HF4	4 207.5 kHz	4 125 kHz
HF6	6 312.0 kHz	6 215 kHz
HF8	8 414.5 kHz	8 291 kHz
HF12	12 577.0 kHz	12 290 kHz
HF16	16 804.5 kHz	16 420 kHz

Remember to use the correct HF procedures.
Do not forget, your **EPIRB** is the secondary
means of alerting