An Roinn Iompair
Department of Transport

Marine Notice No. 18 of 2026

Notice to all Shipowners, Agents, Shipmasters, Skippers and Seafarers

Merchant Shipping (Radio) Rules 2026 – Implementation of SOLAS Chapter IV

1. Purpose of Notice

The Department of Transport would like to draw attention to the Merchant Shipping (Radio) Rules 2026 (S.I. No. 125 of 2026), which were signed into law on 1 April 2026 and came into force on the same date. The Rules implement the revised Chapter IV of the annex to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974 (SOLAS Convention), and replace existing radio rules.

2. Background

Chapter IV of the annex to the SOLAS Convention covers undertakings by contracting governments to provide radiocommunication services as well as ship requirements for the carriage of radiocommunications equipment. The chapter is closely linked to the Radio Regulations of the International Telecommunication Union.

In 2012, at the 90th session of the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), reviewing and modernizing the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), which is dealt with in Chapter IV, was raised. Subsequently, the IMO's Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue set to work on the chapter, modernizing and futureproofing it and removing obsolete requirements.

At the 105th session of the MSC, in April 2022, Resolution MSC.496(105) was adopted. It contained an amendment that replaced the entire text of Chapter IV and another amendment that relocated provisions relating to life-saving communications from Chapter III to Chapter IV.

The major consequences of the revision of Chapter IV are as follows:

- General radiocommunications are now a separate functional requirement from GMDSS, but are still mandatory for all ships at sea;
- Every ship, while at sea, is now required to maintain, where practicable, a continuous listening watch on VHF channel 16. By doing so, non-SOLAS vessels should, when in distress, be able to alert GMDSS-fitted ships;

- Medium-frequency (MF) and high-frequency (HF) direct-printing telegraphy (NBDP) is no longer required for transmission and reception of distress and safety radiocommunications. However, HF NBDP equipment is still maintained for reception of maritime safety information (MSI) and might be used for general radiocommunications;
- Amended Regulation IV/7.1.1.4 (Rule 7(1)(d) in the new Radio Rules) states that "every ship shall be provided with a receiver or receivers capable of receiving MSI and search and rescue related information throughout the entire voyage in which the ship is engaged". Equipment to be carried on board depends on the ship's trading pattern. IMO circular MSC.1/Circ.1645 gives guidance on choosing equipment to meet the new requirement. Consultation of the IMO GMDSS master plan will help to decide which equipment should be carried on board a ship: NAVTEX, EGC or HF NBDP receiver. Information broadcasted on NAVTEX and HF NBDP are complementary to the one broadcasted on EGC. Hence, it is generally mandatory to carry a NAVTEX and an EGC receiver when a ship is sailing in and beyond the NAVTEX service areas;
- The definition of Sea Area A3 has changed;
- There are new performance standards for radio equipment installed after 1 January 2024;
- The SOLAS amendments have moved the requirements for carrying portable two-way VHF radiotelephone apparatus and search and rescue transponders (SARTs) or search and rescue transmitters (AIS-SARTs) from SOLAS Chapter III to Chapter IV. This change has led to some amendments to the wording of the related SOLAS certificates and to certificates relating to the SPS Codes, HSC Codes and MODU Codes.

3. Content of the New Rules

The new Radio Rules apply to passenger ships and to cargo ships of 300 tons or more. Rules 5 to 18 are substantive, detailing the following:

- functional requirements;
- installation, location and control of radio equipment;
- radio equipment for ships;
- additional radio equipment for sea areas A1, A2, A3, and A4;
- radio watches;
- sources of energy;
- performance standards;
- maintenance requirements;
- radio personnel;
- radio log-book, and;
- position-updating.

The Rules revoke the Merchant Shipping (Radio) Rules 1992 (S.I. No. 224 of 1992) and the Merchant Shipping (Radio) Rules 2018 (S.I. No. 452 of 2018).

4. Further Information

For further information on the new Radio Rules, please contact the Marine Survey Office in the Department of Transport as follows:

Marine Survey Office,
Department of Transport,
Leeson Lane,
Dublin 2,
D02 TR60.
Email: MSO@transport.gov.ie.

10/04/2026

For any technical assistance in relation to this Marine Notice, please contact:
The Marine Survey Office, email: MSO@transport.gov.ie.
For general enquiries, please contact the Maritime Safety Policy Division, email:
MaritimeSafetyPolicyDivision@transport.gov.ie.
Written enquiries concerning Marine Notices should be addressed to:
Dept. of Transport, Maritime Safety Policy Division, Leeson Lane, Dublin 2, D02 TR60, Ireland.
email: MarineNotices@transport.gov.ie or visit us at: www.gov.ie/transport.