



MANUAL RESCUE BOAT DAVITS - POTENTIAL PSC COMPLIANCE RISK FOR EXISTING VESSELS

This Regulatory News advises owners and operators of cargo ships fitted with rescue boat launching appliances that rely solely on manual operation without stored mechanical power that the exemption introduced by [IMO Resolution MSC.459\(101\)](#) applies only to rescue boats installed on or after 1 January 2024 and does not cover existing installations. Owners and operators of vessels equipped with manually operated davits installed before this date are strongly encouraged to seek formal flag Administration acceptance under SOLAS Regulation I/5 at the earliest opportunity and retain supporting documentation on board.

BACKGROUND

During a recent Port State Control (PSC) inspection at a European port, a container ship (keel laid December 2008) received deficiency Code 11113 - Launching arrangements for rescue boats. The PSC officer reported that:

- The rescue boat davit could not be slewed out using stored mechanical power or gravity
- It was not possible to actuate the launch from a position within the rescue boat
- No flag state acceptance of the alternative arrangement could be demonstrated on board

The vessel's dedicated rescue boat weighed 610 kg, fully equipped with engine and without crew. The manual launching arrangement consists of a single-arm radial davit without hydraulic accumulator, operated by hand crank.

The PSC argued that the amended LSA Code paragraph 6.1.1.3 (introduced by Resolution MSC.459(101)) applies only to rescue boats installed on or after January 1, 2024. An alternative design for the rescue boat davits may be accepted if it can be clearly demonstrated that it has been approved or accepted by the flag Administration. At the time of the inspection, such approval or acceptance could not be demonstrated.

THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Since 1 July 1998, paragraph 6.1.1.3 of the LSA Code required: *"A launching appliance **shall** not depend on any means other than gravity or stored mechanical power which is independent of the ship's power supplies to launch the survival craft or rescue boat it serves in the fully loaded and equipped condition and also in the light condition."*

KEY NOTES

Applicable requirement:

LSA Code, Chapter VI, paragraph 6.1.1.3 -Stored mechanical power for launching appliances.

Amendment:

IMO Resolution MSC.459(101) - exemption for manual launching of rescue boats ≤700 kg on cargo ships.

Amendment applicability:

Rescue boats installed on board ships on or after 1 January 2024 only.

Notwithstanding this requirement, manual rescue boat launching arrangements have been accepted by many Administrations for decades. In 1998, the Government of the Netherlands formally notified the IMO of an equivalent arrangement under SOLAS Regulation I/5 ([SLS.14/Circ.153](#)), accepting manual davits for rescue boats having a mass of less than approximately 561 kg (5500 N) in fully equipped condition. This equivalence was valid from 1998 until 31 December 2023, coinciding with the entry into force of Resolution MSC.459(101).

The 2019 Amendment – Resolution MSC.459(101)

In 2019, IMO adopted Resolution MSC.459(101), which amended the LSA Code paragraph 6.1.1.3 to permit manually operated launching appliances for dedicated rescue boats (not a survival craft) weighing not more than 700 kg fully equipped with engine but without crew, provided that:

- Manual hoisting and turning out to the embarkation position is possible by one person
- The force on the crank handle does not exceed 160 N at the maximum crank radius of 350 mm
- Bowsing lines or equivalent means of sufficient strength are provided for safe embarkation

However, operative paragraph 4 of the resolution states: *"The amendment to paragraph 6.1.1.3 of the Code shall apply to rescue boats installed on board ships on or after 1 January 2024."* Accordingly, the amendment applies only to new installations and does not retrospectively validate arrangements fitted before 1 January 2024.

The 2025 Unified Interpretation – MSC.1/CIRC.1693

Following discussion, IMO approved [MSC.1/Circ.1693](#) (published 4 July 2025), providing unified interpretations of paragraphs 6.1.1.3 and 6.1.2.2 of the LSA Code. The circular clarifies that, for cargo ships:

- Hoisting up of a dedicated rescue boat from its stowed position is launching preparation, not part of the launching process. Manual hoisting up prior to embarkation may be acceptable for subsequent slewing out.
- For arrangements complying with paragraph 6.1.1.3 as amended by Resolution MSC.459(101), manual hoisting and turning out does not need to be actuated from within the rescue boat.

Importantly, the circular repeatedly refers to 6.1.1.3 *"as amended through Resolution MSC.459(101)."* It therefore interprets the amended requirement but does not extend its applicability to installations outside the scope of that amendment.

REGULATORY IMPLICATIONS FOR EXISTING VESSELS

Where a rescue boat was installed before 1 January 2024 and its launching arrangement relies solely on manual operation without stored mechanical power, the installation may be considered non-compliant with the unamended provisions of paragraph 6.1.1.3 unless the arrangement has been formally accepted by flag Administration under SOLAS regulation I/5. This situation creates a regulatory gap for some existing vessels:

- Many existing cargo ships have manual rescue boat launching arrangements that are safe, functional, and have been accepted for years
- IMO has codified these arrangements as acceptable for new installations, confirming they achieve an equivalent level of safety.
- But the codification was prospective only, and the pre-existing flag Administration acceptances were not always formally documented
- As a result, PSC authorities may raise deficiencies against existing vessels that are unable to demonstrate documented flag Administration acceptance of their arrangements.

ABS RECOMMENDATIONS

For existing cargo ships where the rescue boat was installed before 1 January 2024 and the launching arrangement relies on manual operation, ABS recommends the following actions:

1. **Verify and Document the Technical Particulars:** For each affected vessel, confirm and record the following:

Item	Requirement
Rescue boat mass (fully equipped with engine, without crew)	≤ 700 kg
Manual hoisting and turning out by one person	Confirmed possible
Crank handle force	≤ 160 N at ≤ 350 mm radius
Bowsing line or equivalent for safe embarkation	Adequate means provided
Arrangement status	Original at delivery / unchanged

2. **Obtain Formal Flag State Acceptance:** For existing manually operated rescue boat launching arrangements, the appropriate compliance pathway is generally through acceptance by the flag Administration under SOLAS regulation I/5 (Equivalents), rather than a direct claim of compliance with the amended provisions of paragraph 6.1.1.3 of the LSA Code. Owners and operators should contact their ABS office and request assistance in seeking formal flag Administration confirmation of acceptance. When submitting such requests, supporting technical information should be provided, together with references to Resolution MSC.459(101) and MSC.1/Circ.1693, as evidence that the arrangement achieves an equivalent level of safety.
3. **Maintain Documentation on Board:** Any flag Administration acceptance, equivalency approval, or other supporting documentation should be retained on board with the vessel's statutory certification records and be readily available for review during PSC inspections.
4. **Brief Masters and Vessel Personnel:** Masters and vessel personnel should be made aware of Resolution MSC.459(101) and MSC.1/Circ.1693. The primary document supporting continued acceptance is the flag Administration approval or equivalency determination. Vessel personnel should also be familiar with the operation of the launching arrangement and be prepared to demonstrate its functionality, if requested.

ABS SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

ABS is closely monitoring developments on this issue and can assist owners with technical confirmation of rescue boat particulars, coordination with ship's flag Administration, and preparation of equivalence applications under SOLAS Regulation I/5.

For additional information or assistance, please contact your local [ABS Office](#) or visit [ABS Regulatory News](#).

REFERENCES

IMO Resolution MSC.459(101)	Amendments to the LSA Code -manual launching exemption for rescue boats ≤700 kg (adopted 13 June 2019, in force 1 January 2024)
IMO MSC.1/Circ.1693	Unified Interpretations of paragraphs 6.1.1.3 and 6.1.2.2 of the LSA Code (approved MSC 110, 4 July 2025)
LSA Code, Chapter VI	Launching and Embarkation Appliances - paragraph 6.1.1.3 (stored mechanical power requirement)
SOLAS 1974, Chapter I, Regulation 5	Equivalents - basis for flag state acceptance of alternative arrangements
ISM Code (ISM Code § 6, 7, 10, 11)	Safety Management System requirements for procedures, maintenance, training and documentation
ABS Regulatory News - SSE 9 Brief (March 2023)	ABS reporting on deferred UI discussion on rescue boat launching arrangements
ABS Regulatory News - SSE 11 Brief (February 2025)	ABS reporting on agreed UI for manual hoisting of dedicated rescue boats
ABS Regulatory News - MSC 110 Brief (June 2025)	ABS reporting on MSC approval of MSC.1/Circ.1693
ABS PSC Annual Report 2024	Code 11113 identified among top PSC detention categories
Netherlands SLS.14/Circ.153 (1998)	Historical SOLAS Reg. I/5 equivalence for manual rescue boat davits (valid 1998–2023)
IACS SC 311	Manual hoisting-up and turning-out of dedicated rescue boats from their stowed position on cargo ships

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