

ABS REGULATORY NEWS

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REVISED IMO GUIDELINES FOR MEANS OF EMBARKATION AND DISEMBARKATION

This Regulatory News provides information on the revised IMO Guidelines for Means of Embarkation and Disembarkation [MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1](#). The revision introduces updated ISO standards governing the construction and installation of embarkation and disembarkation equipment, which will apply to arrangements installed on or after 1 July 2026.

KEY NOTES

Applicable requirement:

1 July 2026 (installation date)

References:

- [MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1](#)

BACKGROUND

Safe access to and from ships for pilots, crew, and other personnel is fundamental to maritime safety and operational efficiency. Accommodation ladders, gangways, and their associated equipment are critical for embarkation and disembarkation, particularly in ports and harbors.

The Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), at its 110th session (June 2025), approved amendments to MSC.1/Circ.1331 to align with updated international standards and further enhance safety. The revised circular [MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1](#) provides detailed guidance on the construction, installation, maintenance, and inspection of means of embarkation and disembarkation, such as accommodation ladders and gangways, as required under SOLAS regulation II-1/3-9. The revised circular supersedes the previous version (MSC.1/Circ.1331).

APPLICATION

The applicable construction standard for means of embarkation and disembarkation depends on the ship's construction date and the installation date of the equipment.

The expression "Installed on or after 1 July 2026" means:

- 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
- For ships other than those ships prescribed in the 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.

KEY REQUIREMENTS

Construction - Updated ISO Standards

1. Accommodation ladders and gangways should comply with updated ISO standards or other requirements recognized by the Administration as specified below:

Accommodation ladders and gangways		
Installation Date	Ship Construction Date	Applicable Standard
On or after 1 Jul 2026	On or after 1 Jan 2010	• ISO 5488:2015 • ISO 7061:2015 or ISO 7061:2024
On or after 1 Jul 2026	Before 1 Jan 2010	• ISO 5488:1979 or ISO 5488:2015 • ISO 7061:1993, ISO 7061:2015, or ISO 7061:2024 (insofar as reasonable and practicable)
Before 1 Jul 2026	On or after 1 Jan 2010	• ISO 5488:1979 • ISO 7061:1993
Before 1 Jul 2026	Before 1 Jan 2010	• ISO 5488:1979 • ISO 7061:1993 (Equipment replaced aft. 1 Jan.2010)

*and/or national standards and/or other requirements recognized by the Administration;

Notes:

1. All accommodation ladders and gangways should be designed to allow regular inspection, maintenance, and lubrication of pivot pins, with welding connections properly executed.
 2. Acceptable alternatives to the anodic oxidation requirements should be subject to case-by-case agreement with the Flag States.
2. Accommodation ladder winches should comply with ISO standards as specified below:

Accommodation ladder winches		
Installation Date	Ship Construction Date	Applicable Standard
On or after 1 Jul 2026	On or after 1 Jan 2010	• ISO 7364:2016
On or after 1 Jul 2026	Before 1 Jan 2010	• ISO 7364:1983 or ISO 7364:2016 (insofar as reasonable and practicable)
Before 1 Jul 2026	On or after 1 Jan 2010	• ISO 7364:1983
Before 1 Jul 2026	Before 1 Jan 2010	• ISO 7364:1983 (Equipment replaced aft.1 Jan 2010)

Installation - New Safety Practices

The revised circular introduces a definition for the term “safety net”. A *safety net* is a net which is rigged between the ship's side and the means of embarkation/disembarkation to prevent a person from falling into the water or onto the quayside from a means of embarkation/disembarkation.

Key new safety practices introduced under the installation requirements include:

1. **Alternative protection against side falls:** A safety net is generally required wherever there is a risk of personnel falling from the means of embarkation or disembarkation, or into the gap between the ship and quayside. However, a safety net is not required to address the specific hazard of side falls where:
 - a **rigid top handrail** is fitted at a height of at least **1,000 mm**, and
 - a **side net** is rigged between the handrail and the base of the accommodation ladder or gangway, including its upper and lower platforms.
2. **Enhanced protection for personnel during rigging:** When rigging accommodation ladders, gangways, and safety nets, crew members should be provided with adequate personal protective equipment and should wear **life jackets** and **safety harnesses** to reduce the risk of injury or falling overboard.
3. **Storage and maintenance of safety nets and side nets:** Safety nets and side nets should be properly maintained, regularly inspected, and replaced when necessary. To preserve their integrity and

effectiveness, they should be stored in well-ventilated places, protected from direct sunlight and chemical contamination.

Survey and Testing

Annual Surveys:

Components	Items to be thoroughly examined during annual surveys
Accommodation ladder	Steps, platforms, support points, suspension points, stanchions, safety pins, rigid handrails, hand ropes, turntables, side nets and securing points, davit structure, wire and sheaves
Gangway	Treads, side stringers, cross-members, decking, deck plates, support points, stanchions, safety pins, rigid handrails, hand ropes, side nets and securing points
Winch	Brake mechanism, remote control system, power supply system
Fittings and davits	All deck fittings and davits associated with accommodation ladders and gangways
Means of access to deck	Handholds, bulwark ladders, stanchions

Five-Yearly Surveys:

The following tests should be carried out upon completion of the corresponding annual survey examination:

- **Accommodation ladders and gangways** should be subject to a static load test.
- **Winches** should undergo an operational test by raising and lowering the **unloaded** accommodation ladder.

Test conditions and load: The accommodation ladder or gangway should be positioned horizontally during the test. In the case of an accommodation ladder, it should be suspended by the wire(s) and supported by the winch. The test load should be:

1. the **design load**; or
2. the **maximum operational load**, where this is lower than the design load and marked as per below; or
3. the **owner/operator's nominated load, which** will be regarded as the maximum operational load, when both the design and the maximum operational loads are unknown.

Marking requirements: Following successful completion of the applicable test(s) without permanent deformation or damage, the load used during the test should be marked as the **maximum operational load**. Where the maximum operational load is less than the design load, both values should be clearly indicated on the marking plate.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Shipowners, operators, masters, shipbuilders and designers should take the following actions in preparation for the implementation of MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1:

- **Review existing embarkation and disembarkation arrangements:** Shipowners and operators should review their existing means of embarkation and disembarkation against the revised Guidelines, particularly where new equipment is planned to be installed on or after 1 July 2026.
- **Strengthen inspection and maintenance practices:** Shipowners and operators should verify that safety nets and side nets are properly maintained, periodically inspected, appropriately stored, and replaced when necessary. Maintenance records should be retained in accordance with the Guidelines.
- **Enhance crew safety and training:** Ship personnel responsible for rigging accommodation ladders, gangways, and safety nets should be appropriately trained and provided with adequate personal

protective equipment. Crew members should wear life jackets and safety harnesses when carrying out rigging operations.

- **Prepare for Surveys:** Shipowners and operators should ensure that the annual and five-yearly inspection and testing requirements are incorporated into the ship's planned maintenance system and survey schedule.
- **Verify equipment marking and load information:** Shipowners and operators should confirm that accommodation ladders and gangways are correctly marked with their applicable operating limitations, including the design load and, where applicable, the maximum operational load established through testing.
- **Ensure compliance of new installations:** Shipbuilders designers and equipment manufacturers should ensure that embarkation and disembarkation arrangements installed on or after 1 July 2026 comply with the applicable updated ISO standards referenced in the revised Guidelines.

ABS SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

ABS is closely monitoring IMO implementations and updating Rules, Guides, and approval procedures. For additional information or assistance in assessing compliance with these revised Guidelines, please contact your local ABS office or visit [ABS Regulatory News](#).

REFERENCES

Document	Title
MSC.1/Circ.1331/Rev.1	Revised Guidelines for Construction, Installation, Maintenance and Inspection/Survey of Means of Embarkation and Disembarkation

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