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Shipping Guidance Notice – 113 (a)
The effects of alcohol or drugs on chances of survival at sea
(Repeals SGN 113)

To: Ship Owners, Operators, Master's, Certifying Authorities, Classification Societies and Recognised Organisations

References:

- MGN 193 Amendment 2 (M+F) The effects of alcohol or drugs on chances of survival at sea

1. Introduction

1.1. The aim of this Shipping Guidance Notice (SGN) is to promulgate United Kingdom Marine Guidance Notice (MGN) 193 Amendment 2 (M+F) The effects of alcohol or drugs on chances of survival at sea.

1.2. The notice highlights the adverse effects of alcohol and drugs on the chances of survival at sea. These guidelines are intended to raise awareness of the increased risks.

1.3. *MGN 193 Amendment 2 (M+F) The effects of alcohol or drugs on chances of survival at sea* is appended to this notice.

2. Application

2.1. Owners, managers, masters, and seafarers related to Gibraltar registered vessels are encouraged to review and promulgate the contents of MGN 193 Amendment 2 (M+F).

Steve Gomez – Chief Surveyor
For & on behalf of the Maritime Administrator

Issue date: 14 March 2025

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Maritime & Coastguard Agency

Guidance

MGN 193 Amendment 2 (M+F) The effects of alcohol or drugs on chances of survival at sea

Published 19 February 2025

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Summary

This guidance note draws attention to the risks associated with the consumption of alcohol and the abuse of drugs in relation to the chances of survival at sea.

- alcohol should be carefully avoided if exposure to cold is likely
- alcohol speeds up the rate of body cooling, and thus increases the risk of hypothermia
- any alcohol may be dangerous, but the higher the resulting blood alcohol level, the greater the danger, particularly above 80 mg per 100 ml
- all drug abuse should be considered to be detrimental to survival

1. Introduction/background

1.1 This notice highlights the adverse effects of alcohol and drugs on the chances of survival at sea. These guidelines are intended to raise awareness of the increased risks.

2. Alcohol, hypoglycaemia (reduced blood sugar level) and hypothermia (reduced body temperature)

2.1 There is clear scientific evidence that even quite moderate alcohol consumption normally leads to a reduction in blood sugar, (hypoglycaemia) which is made worse by exercise and/or fasting. In turn, this can impair the body’s response to cold, meaning that an individual loses body heat faster than usual and is at increased risk of hypothermia.

2.2 For this reason alcohol should be strictly avoided particularly if there is a risk of exposure to cold accompanied by exercise (including shivering in response to that cold) and / or fasting.

3. Maximum blood-alcohol levels

3.1 There is wide variability in the effect of a given amount of alcohol on different individuals. The most harmful effects of alcohol have been reported in experiments in which the blood alcohol has exceeded 80 mg per 100 ml (the drink – drive limit). However, in some cases, significant adverse effects have been reported with much lower blood – alcohol levels.

3.2 Any alcohol may be dangerous, but the higher the resulting blood – alcohol level, the greater the danger, particularly when it is above 80 mg per 100 ml.

4. Other substances of abuse that may be detrimental to survival at sea

4.1 There is a large range of different types of drugs that are known to be abused, which have widely varying effects on the body. Certain drugs, in particular barbiturates, morphine and its relatives (including opium) are well known for increasing the risk of hypothermia. Of greater concern, and particularly in relation to cannabis, ‘ecstasy’, and many other drugs, is the fact that they impair mental faculties that are so essential during immersion survival. It is also worth noting that alcohol and other drug abuse is likely to impair perception and memory, and thus prevent survivors from giving their rescuers an accurate account of events.

4.2 Abuse of all drugs should be considered to be detrimental to survival.

More information

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