

Republic of the Marshall Islands

MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

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MARINE SAFETY ADVISORY No. 15-23

To: Owners/Operators, Masters, Nautical Inspectors, Recognized Organizations

Subject: LASER POINTERS AND COLREG LIGHT SIGNALS

Date: 29 September 2023

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) Maritime Administrator (the “Administrator”) was recently informed of two incidents with laser pointers. In the first, when faced with a collision risk, crewmembers on board an RMI-registered vessel used a laser pointer to get the attention of the other vessel. In the second, crewmembers on a fishing vessel pointed a laser at another RMI-registered vessel to attract attention prior to the two vessels colliding with each other.

The Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 (COLREG), Rule 36 permits vessels to, “make light or sound signals that cannot be mistaken for any signal authorized elsewhere in these Rules”. It goes on to indicate that, “the use of high intensity intermittent lights...shall be avoided.”

Because lasers, including handheld laser pointers, produce an intense, directional beam of light that has the potential to cause temporary blindness, the Administrator advises **against** their use for COLREG purposes.

Therefore, owners, operators, and Masters of RMI-registered vessels are reminded that:

- COLREG Rule 34(d) requires when vessels in sight of one another are approaching each other, and from any cause either vessel fails to understand the intentions or actions of the other, the vessel in doubt, “shall immediately indicate such doubt by giving at least five short and rapid blasts on the whistle.” Though, the sound signal may be, “supplemented by a light signal of at least five short and rapid flashes.”
 - Such signal may be made using either the ship’s maneuvering light, a hand-held Aldis lamp or similar device. Laser pointers should not be used.

The Administrator recommends that Masters of RMI-registered vessels review COLREGs and the contents of this Marine Safety Advisory with all navigational watchstanders.

This MSA is evaluated annually by the Administrator and expires one year after its issuance or renewal unless otherwise noted, superseded, or revoked.