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GUIDANCE ON WEARING IMMERSION SUITS IN TOTALLY ENCLOSED LIFEBOATS

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its eighty-fourth session (7 to 16 May 2008), considered the recommendations made by the Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Equipment at its fifty-first session, with regard to potential risks of overheating and dehydration associated with the wearing of immersion suits inside totally enclosed lifeboats, and approved the following guidance.

2 Experience gained during the January 2007 abandonment of the containership **MSC Napoli** during a winter storm in the English Channel highlighted the potential risks of wearing of immersion suits in totally enclosed lifeboats. Although outside temperatures were frigid, a number of crew wearing immersion suits suffered from overheating and dehydration. In document DE 51/INF.8, the Republic of Korea reported similar experience with immersion suits worn during abandon ship drills in moderate conditions, where crew experienced discomfort in a very short period of time, due both to overheating and to interference with seating arrangements.

3 Totally enclosed lifeboats have long been considered to provide adequate protection from hypothermia without the need for the occupants to wear immersion suits. The revised SOLAS regulation III/32 (as amended by resolution MSC.152(78)) requires to carry immersion suits for all persons on board cargo ships, regardless of carriage of totally enclosed lifeboats, stemming from reports of casualties in which the ship sank too quickly for crew to access the lifeboats. Immersion suits were required in order to ensure that thermal protection is available in the event that members of the crew are unable, for whatever reason, to embark on the lifeboats.

4 In general, immersion suits should not be worn when boarding totally enclosed lifeboats. While abandon ship drills are a good opportunity to examine and demonstrate the use of immersion suits, crew training during these drills should emphasize that immersion suits are intended primarily to ensure thermal protection in cases where the totally enclosed lifeboat cannot be embarked on.

5 Member Governments are invited to use the aforementioned guidance and to bring it to the attention of all parties concerned.