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Understanding and Applying the Standard Phraseology according to IALA

Welcome to DigiMar videos!

In this video we will discuss the principles for Routine Maritime Communication according to the Guideline for VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology published by the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities.

The IALA Guideline for Vessel Traffic Service Operators (VTSO) is divided in three main parts: General principles of VTS communication, Message compilation, delivery and interpretation, and Standard Phrases. In this video we focus on Part C – standard words and phrases, and we will exemplify routine communication using the IALA recommended phrases and the phonetic alphabet.

After watching this video, you will know more about Part C – standard words and phrases. You will also know more about routine communication when using the IALA recommended phrases and the phonetic alphabet.

Part C of the IALA Guideline for VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology is in turn also divided in three different sections:

- 1) General phrases, as in information about vessel speed or engine performance, and other general radio checks.
- 2) Provision of information, as in traffic or weather or tidal information.
- 3) Management of ship traffic, as in berthing, anchoring or navigating the VTS area.

To be short, clear and effective, a VTS officer will always communicate using short phrases and not long sentences, well established, common words and use of recommended pro-words, an active voice and direct instructions, a polite voice but no verbal generosity and strictly avoid wordiness. Let us have a look at a few examples!

To be short, clear and effective, a VTS operator will always communicate using, short phrases and not long sentences, well established, common words and use of recommended pro-words, an active voice and direct instructions, a polite voice but no verbal generosity and strictly avoid wordiness. Let us have a look at a few examples!

Please, as you watch, consider the differences between the two alternatives:

- For example: Permission for departure granted. Out.
- As opposed to: Sir, you have your permission for departure granted, bon voyage and welcome back to DigiMar!

Or:

- Request: report when passing buoy number seven. Over.
- As opposed to: Sir, please be kind to report back when you will pass buoy number seven. Thank you!

Or:

- Question: will you be East-bound or South-bound after departure? Over.



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- Just a question, Sir. Can you please tell me if you will be East-bound or South-bound after departure? Please reply!

Of course, the shorter alternatives are the correct alternatives, if the vessel traffic service operator will be effective and avoid wordiness, ambiguity, and misunderstanding. Longer sentences using too many uninformative words will make communication vague and confusing.

Here we have some more good examples from the IALA guideline. In the first example, the VTS operator identifies himself, shares important information, using no unnecessary words or phrases, and signals that he expects a confirmation from the vessel.

“This is Digimar VTS. Traffic information: Ship Sunrise at anchor ahead of you, distance 3 miles. Over.”

In the second example, the VTS operator sends out a typical warning message, a so called *Securité*. Again, he uses no unnecessary words, and the information is transmitted in short and clear phrases.

“All ships, all ships, all ships. This is Digimar VTS. Information: Motor Vessel Sunrise inbound via South Channel is constrained by her draft. Wind at sharp point 320 – 20 knots. Water level at green terminal 4.2 metres. 0.5m above prediction. Keep sharp lookout. All ships, this is Digimar VTS. Out.”

In the third message, the VTS operator gives permission to the vessel to enter the fairway. Once more, the message is clear, with no unnecessary words.

“Sunrise, you have permission to proceed into the fairway from the south. Over. “

The IALA Guideline for VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology offers several tools to facilitate effective routine maritime communication, but one of the most essential and oldest tools given to facilitate communication is the phonetic alphabet. The phonetic alphabet is a compilation of code words for each letter of the English language, and it is based on extensive scientific results.

The phonetic alphabet is to be used for example for ships’ names, calls signs, or local geographical areas and positions that can be difficult to understand and/or pronounce comparing to local or native pronunciation.

The phonetic alphabet sounds as follows: *Alfa, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, Hotel, India, Juliett, Kilo, Lima, Mike, November, Oscar, Papa, Quebec, Romeo, Sierra, Tango, Uniform, Victor, Whiskey, X-ray, Yankee, Zulu.*

In this video we have explained and exemplified the IALA VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology, Part C – Standard Phrases, and the phonetic alphabet.

Thank you for watching and stay tuned for more Digimar videos on effective maritime communication!