IN FORCE | LIFEBOATS

Who may service your lifeboats, and what the paperwork has to prove

Every lifeboat, davit, winch and release hook on a SOLAS ship is examined by a company the flag has authorised, by a technician certified for that make. Who may do what, what the service pack must contain, and what port state control can ask to see.

ISSUED
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APPLIES TO
Lifeboats, rescue boats, launching appliances, release gear

REFERENCE
Res. MSC.402(96) · Res. MSC.559(108) · SOLAS III/20

AT A GLANCE

- MSC.402(96) took effect on 1 January 2020; MSC.559(108) added the ventilation system to the annual examination from 1 January 2026.
- The company is authorised by the flag; the technician is certified by the maker, per make and type, for three years.
- Two different 1.1 times tests every five years, often confused in reports.
- A service pack without the authorisation and the technician's certificate is incomplete.

01 Where the requirement comes from

Resolution MSC.402(96) was adopted on 19 May 2016 and took effect on 1 January 2020, when the amendments to SOLAS III/3 and III/20 entered into force. Resolution MSC.404(96) made it mandatory by inserting SOLAS III/3.25 and replacing III/20.11. Resolution MSC.559(108) entered into force on 1 January 2026 and added a tenth item to the annual thorough examination: the ventilation system, where fitted.

02 Authorised means two different things

- MSC.402(96) 2.2.1: an authorised service provider is authorised by the Administration under sections 3 and 7. The flag may delegate this to its recognised organisation (7.4.3).
- MSC.402(96) 8.1: personnel are certified by the manufacturer or an authorised service provider for each make and type of equipment.
- MSC.402(96) 8.3.1: the certificate states the level of qualification and the scope, and expires three years from the date of issue.

> Authorisation by one flag is not automatically accepted by another. Paragraph 7.4.3 is permissive. Liberia, for example, states in Marine Notice SAF-019 that only holders of a valid Liberian Authorization Document may work on Liberian ships.

03 Who may do which job

ACTIVITY	WHO MAY CARRY IT OUT
Weekly and monthly inspections, routine maintenance (4.1)	An authorised service provider, or ship's personnel under the direction of a senior officer, per the maintenance manual
Annual thorough examination and operational test (4.2)	Certified personnel of the manufacturer or of an authorised service provider
Five-yearly examination, overhaul, overload tests (4.3)	Certified personnel of the manufacturer or of an authorised service provider
Any repair	Certified personnel only. Repair (2.2.6) is anything requiring disassembly or outside the onboard instructions

04 The two 1.1 times tests, which are not the same test

TEST	REQUIREMENT
Winch brake dynamic proof load test	SOLAS III/20.11.1.2 and MSC.402(96) 6.3.1: proof load equal to 1.1 times the weight of the craft and its full complement of persons and equipment; brake applied abruptly at maximum lowering speed
Release gear overload operational test at overhaul	SOLAS III/20.11.2.2 and MSC.402(96) 6.3.3: on-load release gear tested under 1.1 times the total mass of the loaded boat, whenever overhauled and at least once every five years
Annual winch operational test, for contrast	MSC.402(96) 6.2.10: lowering the empty craft or an equivalent load, brake applied abruptly before it enters the water

> A figure circulates as 1.1 times the maximum working load of the winch. That is wrong: the text says 1.1 times the weight of the craft with its full complement of persons and equipment.

05 What the service pack has to contain

- 5.1: every report and checklist signed by the person who did the work and countersigned by the Company's representative or the master.
- 5.2: records filed on board for the service life of the equipment.
- 5.3: a statement that the arrangements remain fit for purpose, with copies of the documents of certification and authorisation.

06 When the maker no longer supports the equipment

MSC.402(96) 2.2.3 recognises any entity that has taken legal responsibility for the equipment as the manufacturer. Under 7.3 Administrations may authorise service providers for equipment whose maker no longer provides support. Flags implement this differently: Liberia uses single-time authorisations under SAF-019; the Marshall Islands requires a short-term certificate from the recognised organisation. We obtain the flag's authorisation before the examination and put it in the service pack.

07 What port state control looks at

CODE	DEFECTIVE ITEM
11112	Launching arrangements for survival craft
11113	Launching arrangements for rescue boats
11129	Operational readiness of lifesaving appliances
11132	Maintenance and inspections
11135	Maintenance of life-saving appliances
15150	ISM, where the failure is systemic

08 Two things that are not established

- MSC.402(96) contains no numbered certification levels. Numbered levels come from ISO 23678:2022.
- MSC.402(96) does not itself require a class surveyor at the five-yearly test. Some flags do. Check your flag, not a general claim.

WHAT TO DO NOW

- Check that each service pack has the authorisation and the technician's certificate.
- Check the dates of the last five-yearly overload test and release gear overhaul.
- Add the ventilation system to the annual examination where fitted.
- For unsupported equipment, ask for flag authorisation before the due date.

HOW OZ MARITIME CAN HELP

- Annual examination and five-yearly overhaul by certified personnel
- Winch brake and release gear overload tests with certified water bags
- Flag authorisation obtained where the maker no longer supports the equipment
- Signed checklists, fitness statement and authorisation copies in every pack

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SOURCES

- IMO Res. MSC.402(96)
- IMO Res. MSC.404(96), SOLAS III/20.11
- IMO Res. MSC.559(108)
- Liberia Marine Notice SAF-019
- Marshall Islands MN 2-011-37
- Paris MoU deficiency codes, 1 July 2025

This bulletin summarises the requirements as we read them on the date of issue. It is general technical information, not legal advice, and does not replace the text of the instruments, your flag Administration's notices, your classification society's rules or the equipment maker's instructions, which take precedence for your vessel. Check your flag, not a general claim.