

What is a “place of safety” under maritime law?

**“Rescue” doesn’t end when people are
pulled from the water.**

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Convention on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) establish the duty of all shipmasters to assist a vessel in distress.

But what happens next?

The SAR Convention (1.3.2, 3.1.9) and SOLAS (reg. 33) require that rescued persons be delivered to a “place of safety”.

To support this obligation, the International Maritime Organization has issued guidelines

that clarify how a place of safety should be understood under international law.

A place of safety is:

- Where rescue operations are considered to terminate,
- Where survivors' lives are no longer threatened,
- A place where their basic human needs (such as food, shelter and medical needs) can be met, and
- A place where the lives and freedoms of those with a well-founded fear of persecution will not be threatened.

What does not constitute a place of safety?

Ships engaged in rescue are generally not considered a place of safety.

Even if they can safely accommodate survivors for a temporary period, they should be relieved of these responsibilities as soon as possible.

States or parts of states where the survivors could face torture, persecution, or other serious human rights violations,

cannot be a place of safety.

**Who is responsible for coordinating
a place of safety?**

Under the SOLAS Convention (reg. 33)
and the SAR Convention (3.1.9),

**the state responsible for the search and
rescue region in which the rescue occurs
exercises primary responsibility for
coordinating a place of safety.**

**A rescue ends only when survivors reach
a place of safety.**

**Swift coordination of a place of safety is
just as important as swift action
to save life.**

Clear and quick determination of a place of
safety is vital for predictable and efficient
commercial shipping operations.

FHAS Foundation
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Action at Sea

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