

## 5. FIRING PRACTICE AND EXERCISE AREAS

Source: UKHO.

*Former Notice 5/19 is cancelled. This is a repetition of the former Notice.*

1. Firing and bombing practices and defence exercises take place in a number of areas in UK Home Waters and off the coasts of Commonwealth countries and Overseas Territories as well as in foreign waters.
2. Limits of practice areas are currently shown for UK Home Waters on a series of six small scale charts called the Practice and Exercise Areas (PEXA) series. Following a review in 2000, limits of firing and bombing areas are now being included on new charts or at full revision of the nautical charts for UK Home Waters. Range beacons, lights and marking buoys which may be of assistance to the mariner and targets which might be a danger to navigation are also included in nautical charts and, when appropriate, mentioned in Sailing Directions. Lights are mentioned in the ADMIRALTY List of Lights. Thus the appearance of 'Firing Practice Area' on a New Edition of a chart is not an indication of a change of use of the area; rather that all appropriate charts will eventually show where the exercise areas exist. Some chart users may not have been aware of the proximity or overlap of their normal limited area of operation to a long established exercise area. All chart users should be aware that there is no intent to change the present areas and any changes will only occur after consultation with local authorities and the public. However, occasionally non-firing practices are arranged outside the limits of the established PEXA. In this case this will be promulgated by the relevant authority via Temporary (T) Notices to Mariners and/or Notices to Fishermen.
3. Outside UK Home Waters, if the information (e.g. limits, buoys, lights) is available from an authoritative source, details will be included on nautical charts at their next full revision.

4. The principal types of firing/bombing practice carried out are:

- a. Bombing practice from aircraft.

Warning signals are usually shown.

- b. Air-to-air and air-to-sea or ground firing.

The former is carried out by aircraft at a large (usually coloured) sleeve, a winged target or flag towed by another aircraft moving on a steady course. The latter is carried out from aircraft at towed or stationary targets on sea or land. As a general rule, warning signals are shown when the targets are afloat, but not when airborne towed targets are used.

- c. Anti-aircraft firing.

This may be from anti-aircraft missiles, guns or close range weapons at a target towed by aircraft as in [paragraph b.](#) above, a pilotless target aircraft, or at balloons, pyrotechnics or illuminants. Practice may take place from shore batteries or vessels. Warning signals, as a rule, are shown from shore batteries. Vessels fly a red flag.

- d. Firing from shore batteries or vessels at sea at fixed or floating targets.

Warning signals are usually shown as in [paragraph c.](#) above.

- e. At remote controlled surface targets.

These craft carry "not under command" shapes and lights. Exercises consisting of surface firing by vessels, practice bombing, and air-to-sea firing will be carried out against those craft or targets towed by them. A control craft will keep visual and radar watch up to approximately 8 miles and there will be cover from the air over a much greater range to ensure that other shipping will not be endangered.

- f. Rocket and Guided Weapons firing.

These may be as described in [paragraphs b. c. or d.](#) above. All such firings are conducted under Clear (Air and Sea) Range procedure. Devices are generally incorporated whereby the missiles may be destroyed should their flights be erratic. Warning signals are usually shown as in [paragraph c.](#) above.

5. Warning signals, when given, usually consist of red flags by day and red fixed or red flashing lights at night. The absence of any such signal cannot, however, be accepted as evidence that a practice area does not exist. Warning signals are shown from shortly before practice commences until it ceases.

Vessels and aircraft carrying out exercises may illuminate with bright coloured flares. To avoid confusion with international distress signals, red or orange flares will be used in emergency only.

*Note:* For identification purposes while in or in the vicinity of the danger area, vessels operating as range safety craft, target towers or control launches for wireless controlled targets will display some or all of the following:

- a. Red flag at masthead;
- b. International Code signal NE4;
- c. Display boards coloured dayglow orange with black letters "RANGE SAFETY" on either side of the wheelhouse;
- d. Dayglow orange cabin roof.

Target towing vessels display a red flag at the masthead and the signals for a vessel towing a tow over 200 metres in length.

6. **CAUTION.** A vessel may be aware of the existence of a firing practice area from nautical charts, PEXA charts, Local Notices to Mariners or similar method of promulgation and by observing the warning signals or the practice.

In the United Kingdom and some other countries, the areas are operated using a Clear Range procedure: exercises and firing only take place when the ranges are thought to be clear of all shipping. It is the responsibility of the designated Range Authorities to avoid accidental damage to any vessel which may be in a firing practice area. If, however, a vessel finds itself in an area where practice is in progress, it should maintain course and speed but, if it is prevented from doing this by the exigencies of navigation, it would assist the Range Authority by endeavouring to clear the area at the earliest possible opportunity. If projectiles or splinters are observed to be falling near the vessel, all persons on board should take cover and immediately call UK Coastguard on VHF channel 16 or DSC informing them of the vessel's situation.

7. Fishermen operating in the vicinity of firing practice and exercise areas may occasionally bring unexploded missiles or portions of them to the surface in their nets or trawls. These objects may be dangerous and should be treated with great caution, no attempt being made to tamper with them or bring them back for inspection by Naval Authorities. For further information, see The Mariner's Handbook (NP100), which details procedures for dealing with munitions and Marine Guidance Note 323 (M+F) Explosives Picked Up at Sea published by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency.
8. All relevant broadcasting authorities around the UK broadcast information relating to Practice Range Safety. Where this is the case, details of the broadcasting authority, times and frequencies of broadcasts, together with a diagram showing PEXA chart limits and Range Control Areas are included in ALRS Volume 3. Outside UK Home Waters, details of the Range Safety Authorities are included, where known, in ALRS Volume 3.
9. It is realised that the foregoing provisions do not apply in all respects in all countries. It is not, however, intended to re-promulgate by ADMIRALTY Notice to Mariners information received about firing practice or exercises in foreign waters. Normally areas are only in force intermittently or over limited periods, and local promulgation or warnings by radio, NAVTEX, visual signals or notices should be such that they will come to the attention of those whose co-operation or instruction is required.

