



PROPER DISTRESS COMMUNICATION CAN SAVE LIVES

The goal of all fish harvesters and fishing crews should be to engage in safe fishing practices at all times, ultimately reducing the risk of a marine emergency. However, if an emergency does occur, knowing how to communicate distress messages and request assistance can mean the difference between life and death. You may only get one chance to call for help, so it is important to learn how to properly transmit a distress message before an emergency occurs. Equally important is the ability to recognize and respond to another vessel's distress.

Marine (VHF) Radios

Marine VHF radio is generally the most effective and reliable means of issuing a distress alert. If you have a marine VHF radio, keep it tuned to channel 16. Know where you are at all times and be prepared to describe your location accurately.

If you are purchasing a new VHF radio, it is recommended that it include the new Digital Selective Calling (DSC) feature on channel 70. DSC is a new feature that provides automatic digital distress alert with the push of a button.

On a regular VHF radio telephone, in case of **grave and imminent danger** (for example, your boat is taking on water and you are in danger of sinking or capsizing) use **channel 16** and repeat "**MAYDAY**" three times. Then give the name of your vessel and its position, the nature of your problem and the type of assistance needed.

If you **need assistance but are not in immediate danger** (for example, your motor has quit and you are unable to get back to shore) use **channel 16** and repeat "**PAN PAN**" three times. Then give the name of your vessel and its position, the nature of your problem and the type of assistance needed.

It is important to remember that channel 16 is used for EMERGENCY and CALLING purposes only. Once you have called another vessel on channel 16, take your conversation to a working frequency and continue.

Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB)

EPIRBs are buoyant radio distress beacons that instantaneously send a signal, which is detected by satellites and relayed to Rescue Coordination Centres in the event of a distress. They can be manually activated, or automatically activated with the use of a hydrostatic release (float free) mechanism.

Vessels under eight metres or vessels fishing inside 20 miles (although it is recommended) are not required to carry an EPIRB. However, as of April 1, 2002, EPIRBs are required on all vessels over 8 metres fishing outside 20 miles.

To be functional, EPIRBs must be registered with the *National Beacon Registry* at **1-877-406-7671**.

Cellular Telephones

With a cellular phone, you can contact Rescue Coordination Centres directly or by dialing ***16** for the Canadian Coast Guard Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centres. Remember that a **cellular phone is not a good substitute for a marine radio** and it is not an approved means of issuing a distress call. Making a call this way does not alert other boats close to you that you are in distress — those other boats could be the ones to help you first if they could hear you.

Please note that not all cellular providers offer the *16 service.

Search and Rescue Transponders (SART)

SARTs are radar transponders used to help locate survivors of vessels that have sent a distress alert. They are detected by radar and therefore operate in the same frequency range as radar carried on most vessels. SARTs transmit in response to received radar signals and show up on a vessel's radar screen as a series of dots, accurately indicating the position of the SART. In the event that a ship must be abandoned, SARTs should be taken aboard the survival craft.

Visual Distress Signals

Visual distress signals such as flares (parachute, rocket, hand held and smoke), code flags, and dye markers can also be an effective way to communicate distress. All crewmembers should be familiar with the location and proper usage of all safety equipment onboard, including visual distress signals.

If you see a distress signal, you are required by law to determine whether you can assist those in distress without endangering your own life or safety of your vessel. Where possible, you must also contact the nearest Rescue Coordination Centre to inform them of the type and location of the distress signal you have seen.

Remember - Not only is it against the law to make a false distress signal, but false alarms commit search and rescue personnel, making them potentially unavailable or further away from real emergencies.

Related Training

Proper training in marine radio communication and marine emergency duties will increase a harvester's ability to effectively respond to a marine emergency, including the proper transmission of a marine distress signal. For more information contact the NL-FHSA at 709-722-8177