

MARINE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS FOR PADDLERS

Modified from US Coast Guard Marine Radio Information for Boaters

Radios That You Need

Before you purchase any other telecom device, boaters should be sure to have a VHF marine radio. A marine radio is the single most important and probably least expensive system you should buy. If you plan to travel more than a few miles offshore, you may also want to consider investing in an emergency position indicating radio beacon, or EPIRB, and a backup VHF radio as well.

If space and cost are not issues, consider a satellite phone or radiotelephone as well. Today, mobile satellite telephones are becoming more common and more inexpensive and will provide easier and clearer communications than a MF/HF radiotelephone, but a HF radiotelephone will receive high seas marine weather warnings.

Radio Watchkeeping Regulations

If you have a VHF-FM radio, there are specific regulations for monitoring/listening to your radio. Improper use of a Marine Radio can result in a fine.

Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!...Sending a distress call

The "Mayday" hail is for life threatening distress. The hail "Pan-pan" is for other urgent matters. To advise of navigation hazards the call is "Securite". You may only have seconds to send a distress call. Here's what you should do:

Procedure for VHF Channel 16 MAYDAY:

1. If you have a VHF marine radio, tune it to channel 16. Unless you know you are outside VHF range of shore and ships, call on channel 16 first.
2. Distress signal is "MAYDAY", spoken three times.
3. The words "THIS IS", spoken once.
4. Name of vessel in distress (spoken three times) and call sign or boat registration number, spoken once.
5. Repeat "MAYDAY" and name of vessel, spoken once.
6. Give position of vessel by latitude or longitude or by bearing (true or magnetic, state which) and distance to a well-know landmark such as a navigational aid or small island, or in any terms which will assist a responding station in locating the vessel in distress. Include any information on vessel movement such as course, speed and destination.
7. Nature of distress (sinking, fire etc.).
8. Kind of assistance desired.
9. Number of persons onboard.
10. Any other information which might facilitate rescue, such as length, type or color of vessel, number of persons needing medical attention, etc.
11. The word "OVER"

Stay by the radio if possible. Even after the message has been received, the Coast Guard can find you more quickly if you can transmit a signal on which a rescue boat or aircraft can home. Today it is possible for the USCG to triangulate VHF radio signals for an accurate position even if you are not sure of your location.

For example:

MAYDAY-MAYDAY-MAYDAY

This is BLUE KAYAK - BLUE KAYAK - BLUE KAYAK

Mayday, this is Blue Kayak

I am approximately 2 miles south of Cape Henry light

I overturned in wake of powerboat and I am separated from boat and paddle

I am requesting rescue of one paddler, afloat, wearing red PFD

BLUE KAYAK is 16 feet long, last seen blowing east. OVER

(Repeat at intervals until an answer is received)

If you hear a distress call...

If you hear a distress message from a vessel and it is not answered, then **you** must answer. If you are reasonably sure that the distressed vessel is not in your vicinity, you should wait a short time for others to acknowledge.

Boater Calling Channel (VHF Channel 9)

The Federal Communications Commission established VHF-FM channel 9 as a supplementary calling channel for noncommercial vessels (recreational boaters) at the request of the Coast Guard. A ship or shore unit wishing to call a boater would do so on channel 9, and anyone (boaters included) wishing to call a commercial ship or shore activity would continue to do so on channel 16. Recreational boaters would continue to call the Coast Guard and any commercial facility on channel 16.

The purpose of the FCC regulation was to relieve congestion on VHF channel 16, the distress, safety and calling frequency. FCC regulations require boaters having VHF radios to maintain a watch on either VHF channel 9 or channel 16, whenever the radio is turned on and not communicating with another station.

Since the Coast Guard generally does not have the capability of announcing an urgent marine information broadcast or weather warning on channel 9, use of channel 9 is optional. We recommend boaters normally keep tuned to and use channel 16 in those waters unless otherwise notified by the Coast Guard.

Procedure for Calling A Ship by Radio

You may use channel 16 to call a ship or shore station, but if you do so, you **must be brief!** We recommend this same procedure be used over channel 9, if channel 9 is used as a calling channel or channel 13 if use to hail a large vessel like a ferry.

For example:

Blue Kayak: "Securite', Securite', Securite' - Bridgeport Ferry, this is Blue Kayak" (*the name of the vessel may be said 2 or 3 times if conditions warrant*)

Ferry: "Blue Kayak this is Bridgeport Ferry. Can you respond on channel 13?" (*or some other proper working channel*)

Blue Kayak: "Channel 13, Roger"

Blue Kayak (on 13): Bridgeport Ferry, we are four kayaks approximately 300-ft off your port bow. We have just left the channel and plan to stay out of your way.

Grand Republic (on 68): Thank you Blue Kayak, we appreciate your call. We see you on radar. Enjoy your day.

Global Maritime Distress & Safety System

VHF maritime channel 70 (156.525 MHz) is authorized exclusively for distress, safety and calling purposes using digital selective calling (DSC) techniques. No other uses are permitted. Channel 70 is used to send distress alerts, safety announcements and for calling purposes under the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS). Many vessels are now equipped with DSC capability and are using channel 70 for this purpose. It is essential that this channel be protected.

Storm Warnings?

The Coast Guard announces storm warnings and other urgent marine information broadcasts on VHF channel 16 (156.800 MHz) before making the broadcasts on VHF channel 22A (157.100 MHz). Storm warnings and forecasts are also made by NOAA Weather Radio on channels WX1 to WX7.

Radio Checks

Radio checks with the Coast Guard Communications Stations on DSC and HF radiotelephone are allowed.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Radio License Information

An FCC ship station radio license is no longer required for any vessel traveling in U.S. waters which uses a VHF marine radio, radar or EPIRB, and which is not required to carry radio equipment. A license is necessary however for any vessel required to carry a marine radio, on an international voyage, or carrying an HF single sideband radiotelephone or marine satellite terminal. FCC license forms, including applications for ship and land station radio licenses, can now be downloaded from the FCC website.

Brief Stations Summary:

| No. | Frequency | Designated use | Comment |
|-----|-----------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 6 | 156.300 | Intership safety | |
| 9 | 156.450 | Boater hailing | Commercial & non-Commercial |
| 13 | 156.650 | Intership Nav. Safety | Ships 20m + maintain listen/watch |
| 16 | 156.800 | Int. Emergency Hailing | USCG monitored |
| 22A | 157.100 | USCG Info/Security Broadcast | Announced on channel 16 |
| 68 | 156.425 | Non-commercial | |
| 69 | 156.475 | Non-commercial | "Pleasure channel" |
| 71 | 156.575 | Non-commercial | |
| 72 | 156.625 | Non-commercial | Intership only |
| 78A | 156.925 | Non-commercial | |
| WX1 | 162.550 | NOAA – Nat. Weather Service | Weather Broadcasts & Alerts |
| WX2 | 162.400 | NOAA – Nat. Weather Service | Weather Broadcasts & Alerts |
| WX3 | 162.475 | NOAA – Nat. Weather Service | Weather Broadcasts & Alerts |
| WX4 | 162.425 | NOAA – Nat. Weather Service | Weather Broadcasts & Alerts |
| WX5 | 162.450 | NOAA – Nat. Weather Service | Weather Broadcasts & Alerts |
| WX6 | 162.500 | NOAA – Nat. Weather Service | Weather Broadcasts & Alerts |
| WX7 | 162.525 | NOAA – Nat. Weather Service | Weather Broadcasts & Alerts |

For general boating safety information questions...

USCG Boating Safety

Hours of operation: Monday - Friday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM EST, excluding government holidays

Infoline: 1-800-368-5647

Text Telephone service: 1-800-689-0816

Email: uscginfoline@gcrm.com

Web Link for source of this information:

www.NavCen.USCG.gov

Aknowledgements:

Prepared paddlers by Gordon Dayton; ACA L4 Open Water Coastal Kayak Instructor; Associate Instructor at Changing Tides PaddleCraft, LLC.

For more information visit www.CTPaddleCraft.com.