Alerting search and rescue services

How to alert search and rescue services in a boating emergency. Information on contacting services, and using your marine radio for distress calls.

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Making the alert

To alert search and rescue services in an emergency, you can:

- make distress calls on your marine radio
- set off distress **flares (/driving-boating-and-transport/boating-and-marine/waterways-safety-and-rules/lifejackets-and-safety-equipment/essential-safety-equipment)**

and display your orange PVC **V sheet (/driving-boating-and-transport/boating-and-marine/waterways-safety-and-rules/lifejackets-and-safety-equipment/essential-safety-equipment)** – when rescuers are in sight

- activate your **Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) (/driving-boating-and-transport/boating-and-marine/waterways-safety-and-rules/lifejackets-and-safety-equipment/essential-safety-equipment)** to send an electronic distress alert via satellite
- use your mobile phone to call Triple Zero (**000** (tel:000)) or the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC Australia) on **1800 641 792** (tel:1800641792).

Raising and lowering your arms to attract attention is an international distress signal.

As the skipper, you're responsible for making sure:

- you have all the **necessary safety equipment (/driving-boating-and-transport/boating-and-marine/waterways-safety-and-rules/lifejackets-and-safety-equipment/essential-safety-equipment)** on board – including flares, V sheet and EPIRB
- flares and distress signals are only used in an emergency.

Marine radio distress channels

You can use your marine radio to make distress calls to other vessels in the area or to shore stations.

There are several channel frequencies for distress calls. Very high frequency (VHF) channels provide a wider coverage than high frequency (HF).

Radio type	Channel frequencies
VHF	16
27 MHz	88
HF	4125, 6215 and 8291kHz

For information about using the HF component of the National Coast Radio Network, see **Radio network services** (https://roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/maritime/using-waterways/navigation-communication/radio-network.html)
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Emergency words

When making a distress call on your radio, use the following words depending on the level of emergency. It’s recommended that you repeat each word 3 times.

If you do not get an answer, repeat the call and message on other available frequencies.

Mayday

Use a 'mayday' call for an emergency message when there's imminent danger to a vessel and the passengers. For example:

- ‘Mayday, mayday, mayday, this is Phantom, this is Phantom, this is Phantom, a 5m red half-cabin. I'm 3 nautical miles off Red Head. We've been swamped by a wave and are sinking. There are 4 people overboard. Over.’

If you hear a mayday call, you should not transmit, but continue to monitor the radio. If a shore station – such as the local Marine Rescue NSW unit – does not respond to the call, try to relay the message and help the vessel.

Pan pan

Use a 'pan pan' call for an urgent message when a vessel is in trouble, but not in imminent danger. For example:

- ‘Pan pan, pan pan, pan pan, this is Phantom, this is Phantom, this is Phantom, a 5m red half-cabin. I'm 3 nautical miles off Red Head. We've been disabled by a wave and need a tow. There are 4 people on board. Over.’

Securite

Use a 'securite' call (pronounced saycure-e-tay) before a navigational safety message, such as a weather report or navigation hazard update. For example:

- ‘Securite, securite, securite, all ships, all ships, all ships, this is Coast Radio Sydney, Coast Radio Sydney, Coast Radio Sydney for a renewal of a strong wind warning. Please switch to channel VHF 67. Out.’

Related information

Lifejackets and safety equipment
(/driving-boating-and-transport/boating-and-marine/waterways-safety-and-rules/lifejackets-and-safety-equipment)

Before you go boating
(/driving-boating-and-transport/boating-and-marine/waterways-safety-and-rules/before-you-go-boating)