

# Proper use of Distress, Urgent and Safety Signals on Channel 16

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Several instances have been reported of vessels calling MAYDAY to report they were out of gas, lost, having engine trouble, etc... and, in each case, when questioned, they advised they were in no immediate danger. The use of MAYDAY in this way violates Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations because it tends to nullify the importance of this signal (In the interest of maritime safety it is imperative that all mariners familiarize themselves with the proper use of radiotelephone signals authorized for the different situations they may encounter). The following is taken from these regulations.

**DISTRESS SIGNALS:** The radiotelephone distress signal consists of the word MAYDAY spoken three times. This signal indicates that a marine mobile station is threatened by grave and imminent danger and requests immediate assistance.

**URGENT SIGNAL:** The radiotelephone urgent signal consists of the three repetitions of the word group PAN-PAN (pronounced pahn-pahn). This signal indicates that the calling station has a very urgent message to transmit concerning the safety of a ship, aircraft or other vehicle, or the safety of a person.

**SAFETY SIGNAL:** The radiotelephone safety signal consists of the word SECURITE (pronounced say-cure-e-tay) spoken three times. This signal indicates that the station is about to transmit a message concerning the safety of navigation or giving important meteorological warnings.

**Distress Calls** The distress call has absolute priority over all transmissions and need not be addressed to any particular station. Any mariner hearing a distress call shall immediately cease all transmissions capable of interfering with the distress message and shall continue to listen on the frequency on which the call was heard. If your vessel is in distress and abandonment is necessary, activate your EPIRB and take it with you. If you do not have an EPIRB, the radio transmitter should be set for continuous emission to provide rescue vessels and aircraft with a homing signal.

**Sending a Distress Call** You may only have seconds to send a distress call. Here's what you do. Transmit, in this order:

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.

Distress signal "MAYDAY", spoken three times. The words "THIS IS", spoken once. Name of vessel in distress (spoken three times) and call sign or boat registration number, spoken once. Repeat "MAYDAY" and name of vessel, spoken once. 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.

Nature of distress (sinking, fire etc.). Kind of assistance desired. Number of persons onboard. Any other information which might facilitate rescue, such as length or tonnage of vessel, number of persons needing medical attention, color hull, cabin, masks, etc.

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.

For example:

MAYDAY-MAYDAY-MAYDAY. THIS IS RED KAYAK - RED KAYAK - RED KAYAK. ANNISQUAM LIGHT BEARS 180 DEGREES MAGNETIC-DISTANCE 1 MILE. CAPSIZED KAYAKER NEED MEDICAL ASSISTANCE AND RESCUE. TWO ADULT KAYAKERS. ONE PERSON DISLOCATED SHOULDER. ESTIMATE CAN REMAIN AFLOAT TWO HOURS. RED KAYAK OVER. Repeat at intervals until an answer is received.