



NC Department of Environmental Quality
Marine Emergency Calls

rev. 09-2023



General Rules

- This section contains general information for marine emergency calls.
- These rules and policies are followed universally throughout the world.

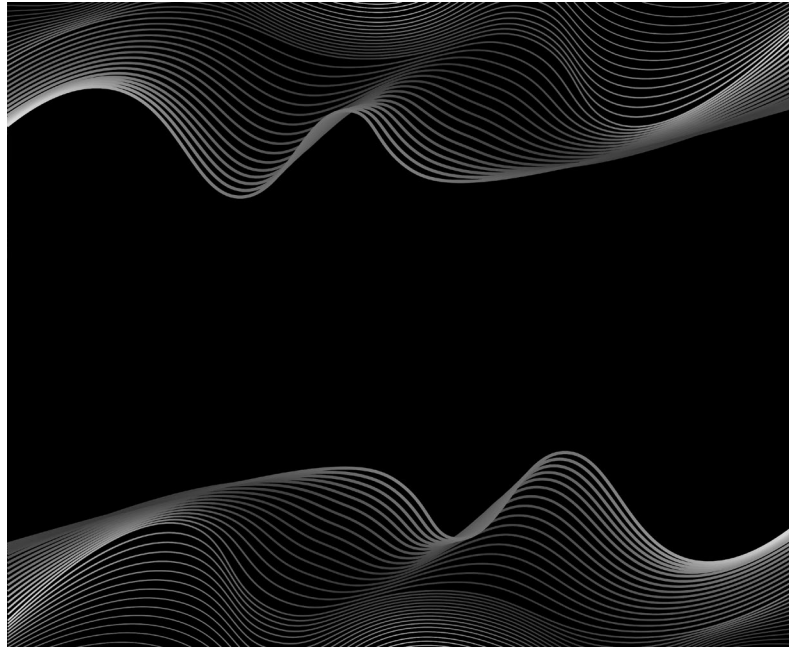


Frequencies

Emergency radio calls are made on the following frequencies:

1. VHF Channel 16 (156.8 MHz)

2. SSB 4125 kHz



Types of Emergencies

The three internationally recognized types of emergency radio calls from most urgent to least urgent are:

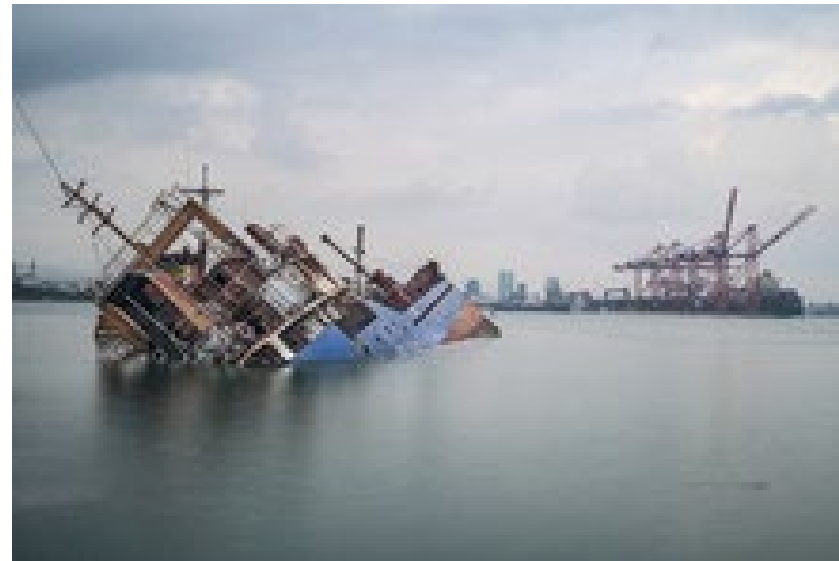
1. MAYDAY
2. PAN-PAN
3. SECURITY



MAYDAY Calls

MAYDAY calls are used only when:

1. A human life or marine vessel are in grave and immediate danger
2. You need immediate assistance



How to make a MAYDAY call

Turn the radio on and select VHF 16 or SSB 4125:

1. Say “MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY”
2. State your vessel’s name or description
3. State your position: latitude-longitude-geographical position
4. State the nature of your emergency (i.e., fire, grounding, medical emergency, fire, etc.)
5. State the number of people on board
6. Release the call button and listen for 10 seconds.
7. Keep repeating until you receive a response or need to abandon ship

Stickers can be purchased to remind you of these steps in a stressful situation



DSC (Digital Selective Calling)

- Some VHF radios have a “distress” or red button. It usually has a cover to prevent accidental activation.
- The purpose of DSC is to send an automated MAYDAY call to the USCG and other emergency services in your area so that you are free to respond to the emergency.
- If your VHS radio is equipped with GPS your position will be announced.
- **You must read your radio manual and program your vessel information in advance.**



Programming your DSC Button

- Refer to your radio owner's manual for specific instructions.
- You will need to know or create a unique MMSI (Maritime Mobile Service Identity).
- You will need the following information:
 1. Boat Information
 2. Home Port
 3. Owner
 4. Emergency Contact Identity



MAYDAY Call Relays

All vessels required to have radios have a duty to pass on unanswered MAYDAY calls. Turn the radio on and select VHF 16 or SSB 4125:

- 1) Say “MAYDAY Relay, MAYDAY Relay, MAYDAY Relay”
- 2) State your vessel’s name and call sign
- 3) State name and call sign of vessel in distress
- 4) State the location of the vessel in distress
- 5) State the nature of emergency for vessel in distress
- 6) State the assistance needed for vessel in distress
- 7) Listen for a response and transmit any additional information requested



PAN-PAN Calls

- PAN-PAN stands for “Possible Assistance Needed”. PAN-PAN calls are made in urgent situations that are not immediately life-threatening to people or the vessel (loss of power, out of gas, lost in fog, slow leak, drifting towards rocky shore, etc.)
- PAN-PAN calls can always be upgraded to MAYDAY calls when necessary.
- PAN-PAN calls alert authorities that you may need assistance soon, but that they can divert assets to other MAYDAY calls.
- In some areas the USCG may not respond to PAN-PAN calls



How to make a PAN-PAN Call

Turn the radio on and select VHF channel 16 or SSB 4125 kHz.

1. Say PAN-PAN, PAN-PAN, PAN-PAN all stations
2. State your vessel name, call sign, and/or description 3 times
3. State the nature of your emergency
4. State your position (latitude, longitude, and loran are preferred)
5. State the total number of people on board
6. Describe your vessel's length, type, color, etc.



SECURITY Calls

Security calls are the lowest priority emergency radio calls. They are used to alert other vessels of nearby hazards such as approaching storms, a navigation light failure, submerged objects, floating objects, large vessel coming through a narrow channel, or military gunnery practice.

Security calls are announced on channel 16 and then move to another channel to relay specific information. Doing so assures that channel 16 remains open for true emergencies.



NC DMF Emergency Calls

- This section of training includes policies and procedures specifically for NC DMF employees.
- These policies are recommended by Colonel Witten of the NC Marine Patrol.



MAYDAY Calls

It is important to know the waters you are in, and whether local emergency responders have boat access.

If so, you may be better off to call 911 first before making a VHF MAYDAY call. Doing so will relay your GPS location if you have location services enabled on your phone. Local responders with boating access will probably reach you faster than the USCG if you are inshore.



PAN-PAN Calls

- In our area the USCG does not respond to PAN-PAN calls. They only respond to MAYDAY situations.
- In a PAN-PAN situation, your best option is to ask for help from within your own department. You may also call Marine Patrol dispatch to see if a Marine Patrol vessel is in your area. Marine Patrol does not routinely monitor VHF channel 16.
- Call 252-808-8138. The main DMF number (252-726-7021) should also transfer to communications after hours.



Summary

- If your VHF radio has an emergency button be sure to program it in advance.
- For non-life-threatening issues (PAN-PAN) ask for help from your department or Marine Patrol.
- In MAYDAY situations VHF channel 16 will reach USCG and other nearby vessels.
- Calling 911 only reaches one person, but it should transmit your GPS location and may result in a faster response if local emergency services have marine vessels.

