

MARINE RESCUE PROCEDURES

During normal radio operation on any band, there is the possibility of an amateur radio operator coming across an emergency call or a distress call from a ship or yacht at sea.

How does one handle a situation where loss of life is a possibility!

There are three types of calls one could hear. Two of the calls are distress calls and the 3rd a call for “getting your attention” – not necessarily a ship or yacht in distress.

DISTRESS CALLS

There are two levels of distress calls, Pan Pan Pan and MAYDAY.

The third call is “Securité”.

All above words are derived from French words or expressions.

Let's handle the calls one by one.

PAN PAN PAN.

A Pan Pan Pan call is used when there is no immediate threat to the vessel concerned, although assistance is almost always going to be required. As an example! A vessel that may have lost power or a mast and may be drifting with no means of control. Man overboard is another situation where Pan Pan Pan is generally used.

Your formal response to a Pan Pan Pan call is:-

“Pan Pan Pan (vessel name)” – repeated three (3) times;

“This is (radio station XYZ), received your Pan Pan Pan”

Confirm reception and signal report.

The questions that need to be asked after making contact with the vessel are handled under MAYDAY, as this set of questions applies to both situations.

MAYDAY.

Let me stress at this point – a MAYDAY call is a very – very serious call and a very serious situation!

The MAYDAY distress call is used when the vessel or aircraft concerned are in grave and imminent danger, and require immediate assistance.

Your formal response to a call MAYDAY is:-

“MAYDAY (vessel name)” – repeated three (3) times;

“This is (radio station XYZ), received your MAYDAY”

Confirm reception and signal report. Once confirmation of a good contact has been acknowledged, the following procedures should follow:-

Establish the following:

1. Vessel name/type/description – e.g. size, motor driven or sail, ski-boat etc. If a large maritime ship – the IMO number – i.e. the International Maritime Organisation number. If necessary, get the spelling of the name of the ship or yacht phonetically to ensure accuracy.
2. Location – Latitude/Longitude. Be very careful to get an accurate position!
3. Nature of problem. What is the nature of the current situation!
4. Last port of departure. Also where is the vessel headed!

At this time it is best to contact the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) on 021-938-3300 for further instructions. Alternatively, use the number 082911.

Should you require backup communications or assistance, you may wish to call Alistair Campbell, ZS5MU, on 039-684-6421. Alistair runs the South African Maritime Mobile Net starting on 14.316 kHz followed by 7045 kHz at 06:30 and 11:30 UTC daily. Alternative call is Francois Botha ZS6BUU at 083 585 3847 or Graham Hartlett ZS6GJH at 082 441 6989.

Additional information, which maybe useful in the event of a maritime rescue, but which should only be asked for as required by MRCC, is:

1. Name of skipper/master; it is essential that the name of the person who makes the final decisions, name is available and known!
2. Intentions of the skipper/master; Very, very important. The Master or skipper of the ship or yacht must very clearly to state their intentions in no uncertain terms! (Those “intentions” meaning – “we are about to abandon ship and need your assistance” – or “we have a rescue tug on its way and need you to stand by” – or “we have instructions to remain on board”, etc.)
3. How many persons on board;
Availability of life jackets, life rafts, flares, portable or fixed VHF radios and a EPIRB beacon – and if possible, the EPIRB NUMBER.
4. Weather conditions and the known proximity of other vessels in the immediate area.

All communications with Maritime stations ought to be kept short, concise and factual as operating conditions almost always preclude lengthy QSO's.

Lastly, the SECURITÉ call

This could be from 2 sources – a ship at sea or from a station on land indicating a warning to all shipping.

From a ship at sea the call could go to all other shipping in a specific area that there are containers that fell off a ship and floating in shipping lanes that could cause damage to other shipping. Or even logs that have been washed out to sea and in a normal shipping lane.

Alternatively, the call could come from land based shipping monitoring radio stations with a warning of severe weather in an area that Skippers or Masters should be aware of.

Finally, should you ever become involved with ANY shipping emergency and you feel you need assistance; don't hesitate to call for assistance. Above all, know what you are saying and particularly, ensure what you are hearing and have to convey to a third party, is accurate and clearly understood.

I would go so far to say, that if you need to convey (patch) an emergency message via phone, cell phone or from someone on the ship via amateur radio – even if this person is not a licensed amateur radio operator – you will not be taken to task; PROVIDED you submit a FULL AND DETAILED report on the incident to the SARL who will inform ICASA.

NEVER make assumptions. You could be the cause of loss of life at sea and the legal consequences are something you don't even want to have a nightmare about!

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NOTES YOU MAY WISH TO ADD.