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BOATING TIMES™ LONG ISLAND

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Marine Electronics: Radio 101

July 1, 2010 by [Captain Vincent Pica](#) · [Leave a Comment](#)

The unfamiliar can frighten us, and new technology may further amplify our fears. Remember the first time you were faced with a phone machine that demanded you “leave your number after the beep– BEEP?” Not knowing what to do was compounded by the *I can't get it back if I mess up* factor. So, are technology + irretrievability (along with untold numbers of listeners) why many boaters shy away from using one of their most important safety devices: the radio? Read on, fellow mariners...

Your VHF radio is likely to be your only reliable source of help, unless you know the cell phone number of every boater in your vicinity! You don't have a VHF radio? If the price of a new radio (with a warranty to boot) deterred you, you're nutty if you'd skimp on your safety with such potentially disastrous results. Prices vary by make and model, but at least get a five watt handheld onboard right away. Tune it to VHF channel 16 and leave it there.

Radio calls fall into three categories when sending important information. Using the proper introduction will save essential time with US Coast Guard Forces. All of the following



introductions are repeated three times, as described.

Imminent Loss of Life Aboard

“Mayday-Mayday-Mayday” is the ultimate call, meaning: “I need help right now. There is imminent risk to lives aboard my vessel.”

Someone to Look Out for Me

“Security-Security-Security” (often said with the French pronunciation – “secure-a-tay”). To be used in instances such as coming into the inlet at night, where you’re unable to see anybody but are worried (as you should be) that there is somebody there. Put out the security call!

I’m in trouble and need advice – ASAP!

“Hailing US Coast Guard, this is the vessel ‘Charlie’ – Hailing US Coast Guard, this is the vessel ‘Charlie’ – Hailing US Coast Guard, this is the vessel ‘Charlie. Over.” Then wait for the watchstander to come back to you. If he or she doesn’t in a minute, keep trying. And get everybody in life jackets!

What you say after the introduction will save time and possibly your life. Identify the name of the boat (if there is no name, give them some way to identify you), the nature of your distress, and where you are. The rest of the transmission will be pretty straightforward for the private boat captain. USCG Forces will essentially take conversational and situational control at that point, gathering essential information (such as how many people are aboard) and directing you to take action consistent with the risk of the situation. They will also put out an urgent call to all boaters in your vicinity to provide assistance if they can. And if the risk warrants it, they will get under way within minutes of your hail to render aid.

For safety’s sake, get a radio – and sound smart out there!

by Captain Vincent Pica