



# Safety of Life At Sea: Rescue 21 - Search & Rescue in the 21st Century

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In 1787, Alexander Hamilton envisioned that "a few armed vessels, judiciously stationed at the entrances of our ports, might at a small expense be made useful sentinels of our laws." Fast forward to today and I am sure that Alexander Hamilton would be astonished at the breadth, depth and intensity of duties carried out by the United States Coast Guard. A major expansion in our ability to conduct the missions and duties established by the Commandant of the United States Coast Guard is through "Rescue 21." (See SSP, 4/23/08, "Safety of Life at Sea: Rescue 21 - USCG Rescue System in the 21st Century") This column is the update on what it is and where it is working.

## Rescue 21 - What Is It?

Rescue 21 is the first major overhaul of the USCG communications system since the 1970s. Rescue 21 is replacing

a wide range of aging, obsolete VHF-FM radio communications equipment:

- Workstations/consoles at about 270 Coast Guard facilities
  - All remote transceiver sites, as well as the network connecting them to the facilities above
  - Approximately 3,000 portable radios
  - Direction finding capability greatly improved to +/- 2 degrees
  - Communications coverage gaps in existing system greatly reduced
- Further, it entails several, integrated capabilities:
- Direction-finding capability.
  - Reduction of coverage gaps along the coast.
  - Enhanced playback capability improving clarity of calls.
  - Digital archiving of calls.
  - Increased (and simultaneous) channel monitoring capacity, ensuring all calls get through.

Rescue 21 is "standing the watch," providing coverage of 34,912 miles of U.S. coastline.

## Who Is Live and Who Is Next:

- November 2005: First life saved using Rescue 21 system
- December 2005: First Rescue 21 system commissioned, Group Atlantic City, NJ
- December 2005: Group Eastern Shore (Maryland, Delaware and Virginia)
- May 2006: Sector Mobile
- June 2006: Sector St. Petersburg
- December 2006: Sector Seattle and Group/Air Station Port Angeles
- September 2007: Sector Delaware Bay
- October 2007: Sector Long Island Sound
- November 2007: Sector New York
- January 2008: Sector Jacksonville
- February 2008: Sector Hampton

Roads

- March 2008: Sector Miami
- April 2008: Group/Air Station Astoria
- May 2008: Sector Baltimore
- June 2008: Group/Air Station North Bend
- July 2008: Sector Portland
- August 2008: Sector New Orleans
- September 2008: Sector Key West
- October 2008: Sector Houston-Galveston
- December 2008: Sector Charleston
- March 2009: Sector North Carolina
- April 2009: Sector Boston
- September 2009: Group/Air Station Humboldt Bay
- October 2009: Sector Southeastern New England
- November 2009: Sector Northern New England
- December 2009: Sector Corpus Christi
- 2012: Full Operational Capability covering 42,000 nautical miles of coastline

## Rescue 21 - How Does It Work?

Well, to start with, here is a list of all the equipment you need to be part of it:

1. a standard VHF radio
2. nothing else.

If it is a "DSC" radio, which will certainly help, but, bottom line, all you need to be able to call for help and have it responded to in 21st century fashion is a standard VHF radio.

### Here's what happens:

1. You send your distress/May-day call. It is automatically recorded and digitized by the station receiving it.
2. Direction finding (DF) equipment from one or more high sites computes the direction from which the signal originated, or line of bearing (LOB). Recall reading about 400' radio towers being installed at USCG stations in the area? This is why.
3. Your distress audio and the LOB are sent to the closest Ground Center(s).
4. Appropriate resources (planes, helicopters, boats) are dispatched to respond immediately - even across regional boundaries. No turf wars in our surf. You're in danger. We're coming.

You might say, "Well, direction finding technology has been around for decades. What's the big deal?" While true and I've used it, this new digital technology is accurate to within +/- 2 degrees. Like a trusty pointer, USCG resources will fly down that Line Of Bearing - and find you.

Who knows, with Rescue 21 in place, what the future holds - but greater safety of life at sea is part of it.

Oh, and one other thing that Rescue-21 does well... it quickly triangulates on false may-days too.

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2010@aol.com or go direct to John Blevins, who is in charge of new members matters, at FSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing..."

Heritage State Bank, Lawrenceville, IL (950 miles)  
West Suburban Bank, Lombard, IL (886 miles)

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