

## Communications afloat

I: New World: HF/SSB increasingly unreliable—USCG shore stations declining and often unresponsive on distress freqs.

II: Better answer for emergency comms: SatPhones, which can be rented for the race and return at nominal cost. I recommend everyone get one of these for the race (also essential for updating weatherfax info).

III: Iridium seems to work better going to Bermuda, but Globalstar is a continuing option. Both are easy to install and use. In either case, program the speed-dial function to the USCG Rescue Coordination Center (Portsmouth VA) phone number: 757 398 6231.

IV: Good article on DSC radios in the Cruising World handout—current information, with a handy Mayday form you should reproduce and fill out for your boat (copy appended here). I suggest you add to that sheet the emergency number above, and your MMSI (DSC radio identifier, so the rescuers can know where you are precisely).

V: Distress hierarchy of “pro-words”:

- A. Mayday = life in danger
- B. Pan, Pan = serious matter, but life not yet in danger
- C. Sécurité = advisory information

VI: Procedure: On VHF and then HF/SSB, transmit the pro-word three times, followed by the boat’s name and/or callsign, position, # of souls aboard, and situation. Then wait for an answer at least a minute and then do it again. Go through three or more cycles. If no answer, shift frequencies if possible and try again. If no answer, return to basic frequency and continue to broadcast at regular intervals. If you are reporting a Mayday, activate the EPIRB and leave it on until the rescue is effected, as it has a homing beacon in it.

A. If the radio procedure doesn’t work quickly, use the Satphone and communicate the same information to the rescue center.

B. Break out flares for ready use to help rescuers locate you.

C. Be prepared to shift frequencies if directed, particularly on VHF.

The rescuers will work on 16 or 22a usually. If you’re several hundred miles

out your first responder will call on Ch16 from perhaps 15,000 feet, so he may be 80miles out. If he has your MMSI number, it will be easier for you both.

VII: Have alternative HF/SSB frequencies programmed into your transceiver. The freqs for USCG voice weather are good for that, as they are guarded continuously for official use only but will receive emergency transmissions when the weather is not being transmitted.

VIII: Have your satphone speed dial also programmed for someone ashore, who can relay by landline to the rescue center or local USCG authorities if you are unable to reach the rescue center.

IX: Maintain your radio guard on Ch16, as you may be the first responder for a fellow racer. If you're concerned about letting your crew sleep, spend \$20 and put in a cockpit speaker by the helm station, so they can listen for distress calls 24/7. It is a legal and moral obligation.

X: This is another of the many things in which preparation is 9/10s of the problem. Be forehanded, consider what you'd do if something happened quickly, and be ready to act promptly and competently. Obviously, someone in each watch section should be capable of handling the distress communication chores.