

Marine Distress Procedure

Mayday – when life or property is in immediate danger

Modern VHF radios has an automated distress capability, DSC, that sends a mayday signal together with the location. Initiate it by removing the safety cover and press the red emergency button. Different radios may have additional requirements, e.g. press for 5 seconds or press twice. A tone signal will confirm that DSC is initiated. Then make a voice mayday call for help:

Speak slowly -- clearly -- calmly.

Do this	Say this
1. Make sure your radio is on	
2. Select VHF Channel 16	
3. Press the microphone button	MAYDAY – MAYDAY – MAYDAY
4. Report ship name and MMSI	This is [ship name] [MMSI number]
5. Say again	MAYDAY
6. Report position, LAT/LONG from radio/instruments, or landmarks nearby	Our position is - latitude [xxx], longitude [xxx] - about [X] nautical mile [west] of [landmark]
7. State the nature of the emergency, e.g. Man overboard, injury, grounded, sinking, fire.	[Explain the situation/emergency] [If possible, explain the help requested]
8. Give number of persons aboard and conditions of any injured	We are [X] people on board...
9. Briefly describe your ship and its seaworthiness	We are on a 42 ft sailing catamaran. It is [safe/sinking/burning...]
10.	I will be listening on Channel 16
11.	This is [ship name] OVER
12. Release microphone button and listen. Someone should answer. If not, repeat call, beginning at item 3 above.	

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Mayday – when life or property is in immediate danger

First, invoke the DSC radio automated distress function by removing the safety cover and press the **red** emergency button.

Different radios may have additional requirements, e.g. press for 5 seconds or press twice. Then make a voice mayday call for help:

Speak slowly -- clearly -- calmly.

Do this	Say this (FILL THIS IN BEFORE MAKING CALL)
1. Make sure your radio is on	
2. Select VHF Channel 16	
3. Press the microphone button	MAYDAY – MAYDAY – MAYDAY
4. Report ship name and MMSI	This is [NAME:], [MMSI:]
5. Say again	MAYDAY
6. Report position, LAT/LONG from radio/instruments, or landmarks nearby	Our position is - latitude [], - longitude [], - about [X] nautical miles [direction] of [landmark]
7. State the nature of the emergency, e.g. Man overboard, injury, grounded, sinking, fire.	[Explain the situation/emergency] [If possible, explain the help requested]
8. Give number of persons aboard and conditions of any injured	We are [] people on board...
9. Briefly describe your ship and its seaworthiness	We are on a [] ft sailing catamaran. It is [safe/sinking/burning...]
10.	I will be listening on Channel 16
11.	This is [] OVER
12. Release microphone button and listen. Someone should answer. If not, repeat call, beginning at item 3 above.	

Less urgent alternatives to MAYDAY

Least threatening: **Securite, securite, securite** (e.g. you are towing someone and have restricted maneuverability and you want all others to avoid you or to let you know if there's a potential issue)

Moderately threatening: **Pan pan, pan pan, pan pan** (e.g. you have grounded and believe you may be taking on water slowly or are a hazard to navigation)

Routine VHF call, ship-to-ship, or ship-to-shore in the US

1. Set radio to 1 or 5 watts if likely to work
2. Listen to the channel you plan to use (e.g. 68, 69, 71, 72, 78a) and make sure it is free.
3. Go to Channel 16 (or 9) unless another channel has been agreed

*In the example below, you are **Barracuda**, and you are calling **Nemo**;*

4. "Nemo, Nemo, Nemo, this is Barracuda on channel one-six, OVER."
5. "Barracuda, this is Nemo, OVER."
6. "Nemo, switch to channel seven-one, OVER."
7. "Barracuda, switching seven-one, OVER."

Re-establish at new channel and conduct call

8. "Nemo, this is Barracuda, OVER."
9. "Barracuda this is Nemo, OVER."
10. "Nemo, this is Barracuda – [message...], OVER."
11. At the end say "Barracuda going back to one-six, OUT."

Note 1, limits on calling

You must not call the same station for more than 30 seconds at a time. If you do not get a reply, wait at least two minutes before calling again. After three calling periods, wait at least 15 minutes before calling again.

Note 2, channel direction

Even though you are calling, you may be directed to a channel. E.g. if you call a marina or a bridge, and often in the Bahamas, the first reply (5. above) may include a working channel. Just be prepared, confirm the new channel and continue.

NATO Phonetic Alphabet

A	Alfa	N	November
B	Bravo	O	Oscar
C	Charlie	P	Papa
D	Delta	Q	Quebec
E	Echo	R	Romeo
F	Foxtrot	S	Sierra
G	Golf	T	Tango
H	Hotel	U	Uniform
I	India	V	Victor
J	Juliett	W	Whiskey
K	Kilo	X	X-ray
L	Lima	Y	Yankee
M	Mike	Z	Zulu
0	Zero, nadazero	000	Thousand
1	One, unaone	. (full stop)	Stop
2	Two, bisstotwo		
3	Three, terrathree		
4	Four, kartefour		
5	Five, pantafive		
6	Six, soxisix		
7	Seven, setteseven		
8	Eight, oktoeight		
9	Nine, novenine[30]		
. (decimal point)	Decimal, (FAA) point		
00	Hundred		

Checklists

Crew Safety Briefing

Daily Pre-departure

Setting Sail

Gear Planning (before leaving home)

Charter Checkout / Questions

Charter Return

CREW SAFETY, AND THE LAW, BRIEFING

In addition to the charter briefing, and before you get under way for the first time, gather the crew for a formal safety briefing. The list below covers the key points a skipper should raise; add more points if required.

Emergency equipment

- ☐ **PFD/Life jackets and throwable** - point out location and demonstrate use. (Federal requirement)
- ☐ **Fire extinguishers** - locations and instruct use. (Federal requirement)
- ☐ **Navigation lights** (Federal requirement)
- ☐ **Horn and flares** - point out their location and instruct on when and how to use them. (Federal regulation)
- ☐ **VHF radio** - everyone knows how to make an emergency call, turning on, answering, calling, mayday. Using hand-held. Call signs.
- ☐ **Bilge pumps** - locate them, check their strainers, and operate them.
- ☐ **Life raft, ditch bag, EPIRB/PLB**
- ☐ **Emergency tiller**

Boat safety

- ☐ **Lookout** - everybody is a lookout. Speak up! (COLREGS 5)
- ☐ **Winches** - demonstrate safe techniques for using them.
 - ☐ Look all over where the line is moving, make sure there are no snags. Stop if unsure.
 - ☐ Hands away, gloves, don't wrap line around hand.
 - ☐ Don't use electric button if not necessary.
 - ☐ How to release rope clutch
 - ☐ Prepare lines for next procedure, avoid tangles, keep them ready!
- ☐ **Propane stove** - demonstrate the proper operating routine, incl solenoid
- ☐ **Emergency anchor drop**
- ☐ **Carbon monoxide**
 - ☐ Brief crew and passengers about risks, symptoms.
 - ☐ Can be caused by engine, heater, generator, stove, BBQ
 - ☐ Don't spend any time near exhausts for running engines or generator (!). Also can come from other vessel nearby.
 - ☐ Check for water coming out of exhaust, i.e. confirm not blocked

Other

- ☐ **Head** – Marine Sanitation Device operation, Y-valve, holding tank/black water, 3 mile/12 mil rule (MARPOL)
- ☐ **Oil pollution placard** (+26')
- ☐ **Garbage placard** (+26')
- ☐ **Trash management plan** (+40')

Personal safety

- ☐ Slow down - move about cautiously because boats move and heel. Do one thing at a time. Look at what you are doing! Check for snags.
- ☐ One hand for boat and one for self
- ☐ Stay safe on deck - use the windward side deck when going forward and avoid the arc swept by the boom.
- ☐ No upper deck seating while sailing. The boom is dangerous.
- ☐ Hatches and companionways beware of stepping into these openings.
- ☐ Swimming - before diving in, make sure the swim ladder is down, watch for current, and tell someone you're going.
- ☐ Look out for one another - take a buddy when swimming or exploring.
- ☐ Don't fall overboard.
- ☐ Electric winches, gloves, fingers - see above
- ☐ Windlass, bridle, chain, tight space
- ☐ Use of fenders vs hands
- ☐ Exits:
 - ☐ Locked doors, how to get out.
 - ☐ Using hatches
 - ☐ Upside down

Convenience rules

- ☐ Fridge/freezer rules
- ☐ Crumbs
- ☐ No sand on boat
- ☐ Rinse off salt
- ☐ Don't stomp on the boat at 6am

Daily PRE-DEPARTURE briefing

Before each day's departure, make sure that everybody knows the program for the day and what each crewmember needs to do to help it go smoothly.

- ☐ Review the weather forecast and how it will affect your sailing.
- ☐ Review the destination and what you expect to find and do there.
- ☐ Review the route you will take, the points of sail you will be on, and the ETA.
- ☐ Discuss alternative destinations in case of the unexpected.
- ☐ Review your communications needs and the VHF channel you will use.
- ☐ Decide on crew roles for the day.
- ☐ Review any technical issues such as systems that need maintenance.
- ☐ Review the galley schedule - lunch, snacks, beverages, etc.

- ☐ Describe in detail your departure procedure (drop mooring, raise anchor, e.g.) and divide tasks among the crew.

Prepare to get under way,

- ☐ Walk through the boat and see that all equipment, provisions, and personal items are securely stowed. Avoid cameras sliding off table or bags falling off settees.
- ☐ Square away the galley and shut off the propane.
- ☐ Secure all ports and hatches. **Raise swim ladder.** Secure dinghy.
- ☐ Turn off genset if there is any risk water intake may get above surface
- ☐ Check seacocks, strainers, oil
- ☐ Check/set lights
- ☐ Make sure you have enough fuel or know where you can refuel.
- ☐ Check for swimmers or unexpected items in the water.

Other

- ☐ Raising dinghy
 - ☐ Raise carefully on davit: Make sure no lines are tangled. Watch prop not catching or bouncing on sugar-scoop.
 - ☐ Secure winch line and safety latch. If weather, prevent from bouncing back and forth.
 - ☐ Remove drain plug in case it rains.

Setting sail

HOISTING THE MAINSAIL

Turn head to wind and slow down until just maintaining headway. Use autopilot if convenient.

1. Slacken the boom vang and the mainsheet so you will be able to fully raise the sail.
2. Raise the sail with the halyard, using the winch as needed.
 - a. Look at leech and be careful to not get caught on the lazy jacks.
3. Make sure the halyard's clutch is locked closed and remove the halyard from the winch.
4. If the boat has a topping lift, slacken it.
5. Take control of the mainsheet by wrapping it around the winch and then fully open its clutch.
6. Bear away and start sailing.

LOWERING THE MAINSAIL

Choose a quiet place where you can safely take time out to drop the sail.

1. Make sure the boom is supported by the rigid vang or the topping lift.
2. Turn the boat into the wind and hold it in position there, maintaining headway with the engine.
3. Ease the mainsheet.
4. Put two or three turns of halyard on the winch. Open the clutch and slowly ease the first few feet of the halyard. Continue to ease the halyard while the crew flakes the sail as it comes down.
5. Stow the sail by flaking it neatly over the boom or into its pack, working forward from the clew and pulling the leech back as you fold the sail alternately to the left and right.
6. Secure the cover over the sail to protect it from the sun.
7. Tighten lines to keep them from slapping and boom from moving.

SETTING THE HEADSAIL

1. To set the roller-furling jib, choose either a **close-reach course** or a **deep broad-reach course** where the mainsail will largely blanket the jib.

One goal is to allow the sail to flog as little as possible. Another is to avoid overrides on the furling drum that can arise if the sail is allowed to unfurl in a rush.
2. Clear the furling line so it cannot become snarled. Take a turn around a winch or cleat with it so you can control the rate at which the line pays out as the sail unfurls.
3. Take several wraps with the jibsheet around its winch and begin to crank the sail out. Once it begins to fill, control the rate it unfurls with the furling line.
4. Trim the jib to your point of sail.

FURLING THE HEADSAIL

1. Furl the jib when sailing either on a **close reach** or on a **broad reach** with the headsail blanketed behind the mainsail.
2. Leave one wrap of the jibsheet around the winch. As you pull in the furling line, pay out the jibsheet while maintaining a little tension on it to ensure a tight furl.
 - a. Remember that close hauled means more power on the jib, so be careful about going more into the wind while furling.

Gear planning checklist – before leaving home

The clothing listed below is typically adequate for a week in the Caribbean (or anywhere warm). In the mid-latitudes you might also need foul weather gear and a warm-up layer. Ask the charter company about local customs - locals in some countries dress very modestly for social gatherings and appreciate visitors who do the same. Confirm also what is provided on the boat, as you don't want to pack anything you won't need.

One more note – you will pack too much and use few of the items. Everyone does it. Just because it is on the list below doesn't mean it makes sense to bring it. 😊 Travel light, but be safe.

- ☐ Swimsuits and cover-ups
- ☐ Sunglasses (polarized vs. non-polarized) and retainer strap. Bring a spare pair.
- ☐ Shirts: tees, polo shirts, sun-shirts
- ☐ Shorts: quick-dry, zippered pockets
- ☐ Sailing gloves
- ☐ Quick-dry long pants, long-sleeved shirt (for sun protection)
- ☐ PFD (for those who prefer their own)
- ☐ Basic first aid kit (antihistamine, ibuprofen, tweezers, non-stick gauze)
- ☐ Fleece or lightweight jacket
- ☐ Sunscreen and lip balm
- ☐ Rain jacket - hooded, lightweight, breathable
- ☐ Seasickness medication, prescription meds*
- ☐ Personal flashlight (small, waterproof)
- ☐ Travel alarm clock
- ☐ Shoes
- ☐ Evenings ashore
 - ☐ Ladies: capris, top, sundress
 - ☐ Gents: lightweight slacks/shorts, shirt
- ☐ Documents:
- ☐ Photo ID*
- ☐ Toiletries, wash kit, biodegradable body wash
- ☐ Passport w/visa (if needed)*
- ☐ Microfiber sports towel, beach towel
- ☐ Debit or credit card, with PIN for cash advances*
- ☐ Charter and provisioning documents*
- ☐ On board: non-slip, non-marking, closed-toed

- ☐ Sailing logbook, log sheets
- ☐ Camera
- ☐ Cell phone/charger/adaptor
- ☐ Books, magazines, games
- ☐ Music: iPod, speakers or audio cable
- ☐ Laptop/iPad, charger
- ☐ Inverter 12VDC to 110/220VAC (for gadget chargers)
- ☐ Charts, cruising guide
- ☐ Navigation tools
- ☐ Handheld radios
 - ☐ VHF
 - ☐ GMRS
 - ☐ GPS
- ☐ Club or personal burgee
- ☐ Multitool
- ☐ Lengths of light line
- ☐ Cable ties, duct tape
- ☐ Soft-sided cooler
- ☐ Ashore: sandals, water shoes
- ☐ ASA International Proficiency Certificate
- ☐ Hat: ballcap, visor, or sun hat (with hat leash)
- ☐ Zip-closure plastic bags
- ☐ Duffle bag (collapsible, no wheels)
- ☐ Daypack
- ☐ Wetsuit, snorkel, mask, fins, mesh bag
- ☐ Fishing gear
- ☐ Mosquito repellent, for skin and to burn as incense
- ☐ Fly paper, to rid the inside of the boat

Note: pack items marked * in carry-on luggage

Charter boat checkout

- ☐ Standing rigging
- ☐ Sail plan, sheets, bags, curler.
- ☐ Running rigging
- ☐ Reefing procedure
- ☐ Winches, clutches
- ☐ Fenders w. lines
- ☐ Steering, autopilot, emergency tiller
- ☐ Nav instruments - compass, electronic,
- ☐ chart plotter, masthead fly
- ☐ Autopilot
- ☐ VHF radio
- ☐ Running, steaming, anchor lights
- ☐ Anchor, windlass, manual override, snubber.
 - ☐ Rode length, markings? Second/spare anchor with rose?
- ☐ Propane tanks - filled, secured
- ☐ BBQ grill
- ☐ Emergency equipment, safety gear, gear inventory
- ☐ Thru-hull locations
- ☐ Diesel fuel - fill, capacity, level, consumption
- ☐ Engine review - oil, coolant, belts
- ☐ Batteries - inspection, operation, charge
- ☐ Power panel - shore power, 12V, inverter
- ☐ Bilge pump - auto and manual - hand pump lever
- ☐ Fresh water - fill, capacity, level, switchover
- ☐ Heads - flush, holding tank options
- ☐ Sinks and showers, shower pump
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Propane stove/oven - solenoid switch, test
- ☐ Air conditioning/heating
- ☐ Dinghy - inflation, outboard/gas, towing, drain plug, dead-man's switch, fuel type
- ☐ Kayak, sailboard, or SUP operation
- ☐ Check-in time/procedure, contact numbers

- ☐ Dinghy
 - ☐ Painter
 - ☐ Two oars
 - ☐ Gasoline
 - ☐ Anchor
 - ☐ Emergency stop

Charter questions

- ☐ DSC / MMSI setup?
- ☐ What are local VHF channels?
- ☐ Radio procedure (local)
- ☐ Tides and currents
- ☐ Local winds
- ☐ Is there an emergency org or coast guard?
- ☐ Boat registration and documentation
- ☐ Equipment manuals.
- ☐ Engine start/stopping procedure.
- ☐ Generator start/stopping. Can it run under power? Is it still cooling in waves?
- ☐ How is battery bank charging set up, do we switch?
- ☐ How do we know battery level is low and needs topping up?
- ☐ Is fridge always on (dedicated inverter) or do we turn off on low battery, during night?
- ☐ Aircon start/stopping.
- ☐ Water maker, starting, stopping, flushing
- ☐ Windlass, requires engine? Which engine?
- ☐ Is there a spare anchor for Bahamian mooring? Is there rode for it?
- ☐ Charts?
- ☐ Reefing type? Lines, reefing procedure.
- ☐ Can props be locked in gear while sailing, or do they have to be in neutral?
- ☐ Can all cleats be used for mooring? Compare to Leopards seagull striker with labels saying they cannot take load.
- ☐ Do we fill tanks/water before returning?

Other

- ☐ Permits for national parks and protected areas
- ☐ Fishing permit

Charter return checklist

BOAT RETURN CHECKLIST

- ☐ Pack personal gear.
- ☐ Linens - bag and set aside.
- ☐ Empty fridge and lockers.
- ☐ Pack or dispose of unused food.
- ☐ Tidy interior.
- ☐ Top-up fuel.
- ☐ Empty holding tanks.
- ☐ Contact charter base for docking instructions.
- ☐ Complete maintenance debrief form.
- ☐ Complete customer survey.
- ☐ Remove all trash.
- ☐ Return borrowed or rented equipment.
- ☐ Verify boat is shipshape.
- ☐ Walk-through and gear inventory.
- ☐ Clear security deposit, sign off charter
- ☐ Fill in your ASA logbook.
- ☐ Crew photo!