



We Turn Private Boat Owners into Private Boat Captains



Safety of Life At Sea:

Rescue 21 USCG Rescue System in the 21st Century

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I mentioned in a prior column that we'd get to such topics as "Rescue 21" and here we are. Well, what is it? It is many things and it has, in fact, been late aborning. But, when Secretary of Homeland Security pulled FEMA out of the Katrina rescue and recovery efforts and gave it to the USCG one week after the disaster cascaded into pandemonium, the 21st century had arrived for search and rescue. In the days and weeks that followed, USCG Forces rescued over 33,500 souls – from roof-tops, trees and hospital beds. The new system, called Rescue 21, is now the nation's primary maritime emergency system for the more than 78 million boaters and 13 million vessels that navigate coastal and inter-coastal waters.

Rescue 21 – What Is It?

Last August, on the 217th birthday of the US Coast Guard, we learned from a long-toiling USCG historian, who used source documents, that USCG Forces had saved over 1.1 million lives since inception in 1790. The system, however, had not had a major overhaul since the National Distress and Response System (NDRS) was built during the 1970s. Rescue 21 is it. 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.

While still being deployed along the entire US coast area (that's 95,000 miles of coverage), it is already on duty and at the ready in over 13,500 of those miles, including ours.

Rescue 21 is operational in the following Regions:

- Sector Mobile
- Sector St. Petersburg
- Sector Seattle
- Group/Air Station Port Angeles
- Sector Delaware Bay
- Sector Long Island Sound (yes, that's us!)
- Sector New York
- Sector Jacksonville
- Sector Hampton Roads
- Sector Miami

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, that will certainly help (more on that in the weeks ahead), 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:

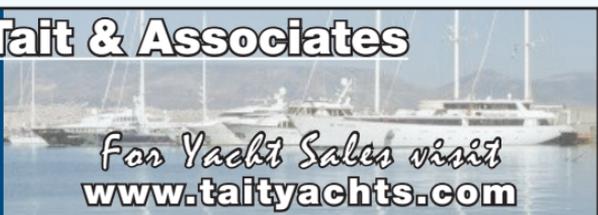
1. You send your distress/May-day call. It is automatically recorded and digitized by the station receiving it.
2. Direction finding (DF) equipment from one or more high sites computes the direction from which the signal originated, or line of bearing (LOB). Recall reading about 400' radio towers being 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.

If you are interested in being a volunteer member of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2008@aol.com or go direct to MaryJo Cruickshank, who is in charge of new members matters, at FSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing..."

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