



"Hello? Hello? Can You Hear Me Now?" Cell Phones and Boats



by VINCENT T. PICA, II
DISTRICT COMMODORE, FIRST DISTRICT, SOUTHERN REGION (D1SR)
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

When I wrote about the need and use of a VHF radio, (see SSP, "Sounding Smart on the Radio", 9/12/12) I noted that if you didn't have a radio aboard you were risking your life over a couple hundred dollars - it was "nutty" not to have a radio aboard. Nonetheless, many don't! And those skippers rely on their cell phone for emergency assistance. OK, I guess you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. Here is the "scuttlebutt" on cell phones on the water...

*CG - Gone

Starting in the early 90s, many cell phone service providers offered a special telephone number that would give you direct access, via your cell phone, to a US Coast Guard Operations Center. However, as many cell systems were upgraded, the feature didn't migrate to the new system and the Coast Guard found that coverage was thus very spotty and could create dangerous delays in dispatching USCG resources to an emergency situation. As a consequence, in October 2006, the Coast Guard requested that all cellular phone service providers discontinue the *CG service, except in Alaska, and any such calls be routed to the 911 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) nearest to where the call originated.

Even when it worked, mariners didn't always know where they were and the USCG had no ready mechanism to determining where they were. Now, with Rescue 21, this problem has been dramatically reduced and often eliminated (see SSP, "Rescue 21 - 21st Century Savior", 10/3/12) if you are using a VHF radio. Lastly, even when you did reach the USCG, they were the only one aware of your predicament. VHF-16 is, by Federal law, required to be monitored by all vessels equipped with a VHF radio. Another



private boater could be much closer to you than the nearest USCG station - and getting the "rescue clock starts now" sequence going may be the difference between life and death... (see SSP, "The Good Samaritan", 2/8/12)

But I Want My Cell Phone!

OK, skipper, here is the scuttlebutt. First, there is no - none - reliable way to be definitive about cell phone coverage at sea. Is it better the closer you are to land? Yes, compared to being far away. But cell phone systems are designed for land-base use and the associated physics of how objects absorb and reflect signals. Water is an entirely different kettle of fish, no pun intended. Another agonizing puzzle is when you can see "5 bars" on your cell phone but still can't connect a call. Why..? Here is a likely scenario - there is a cell phone tower high up on a hill somewhere and it, with its higher-powered signal, can see you. But your cell phone isn't strong enough to transmit all the way back to the cell tower! So, if you are intent on using your cell phone at sea, start looking into external antennas and signal boosters.

Some boosters claim, when attached to an external 8' antenna, that the signal range can extend up to 50 miles. Now, if you are ready to spring for the cost of the external antenna, can I suggest again that you attach a VHF radio to it..?

The Technology

The world-wide cellular system depends on two things - low power transmission and continual reuse of a limited number of frequencies. This is where the term "cell phone" comes from - you travel from cell to cell, bounded by low-power transmission, and are handed off automatically from one radio frequency to another. The cell tower is transmitting, usually, at just a few watts and your cell phone is transmitting back at even lower power - as low as 1/1,000th of a watt. It is always lower than one watt. (BTW, a handheld VHF radio is transmitting at five watts and the "desk-top" VHF radio is transmitting at 25 watts...) As you travel towards the edges of adjacent cells, the cell phone tower's software coordinates the hand-off from cell-a to cell-b. If your boat is disabled and bobbing in the waves, there is no way to move closer to an adjacent cell like your car naturally does...

To Take Or Not To Take?

Take it, by all means! When it does work, there is no better way to have a private, non-emergency conversation and most USCG and USCGAux vessels are equipped with cell phones for this reason. But, when it comes to an emergency, your VHF radio is the best and fastest way to being rescued..!

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux@aol.com or go direct to the D1SR Human Resources department, who are in charge of new members matters, at DSO-HR and we will help you "get in this thing..."



County Clerk Update

by SUFFOLK COUNTY CLERK
JUDY PASCALE

BECOMING A NOTARY PUBLIC IN SUFFOLK COUNTY

Suffolk County Clerk Judith Pascale is encouraging anyone who has considered becoming a Notary Public to visit www.SuffolkCountyNY.gov/clerk to learn more about the process.

A Notary Public is a state-appointed official who administers oaths and serves as an impartial witness when important documents are signed. A Notary Public most commonly administers oaths and affirmations but can also certify acknowledgements on documents such as deeds, mortgages or powers of attorneys. A Notary Public is commissioned to serve for four years.



"If you are eighteen years old, a citizen of the United States and either live or have an office in New York State, you are eligible to serve as a Notary Public," stated Suffolk County Clerk Judith A. Pascale. "Because you will need to pass an examination in order to serve, you should visit our office so that we can provide you with a copy of the Notary Public License Law study guide," continued Pascale.

The Notary Public Exam is a walk-in exam given regularly throughout New York State. In Suffolk County, the exam is administered by New York State Department of State in Hauppauge at the New York State Office Building located on Veteran's Highway. An appointment is not necessary; examinations are conducted on a "walk-in" basis.

The fee to take the exam is \$15.00, due on the date of the exam, payable by check or money order to the "Department of State". Cash is not accepted.

The Office of the Suffolk County Clerk maintains records of all Notaries Public commissioned in Suffolk County and provides authentications of Notary Public signatures. In addition, Notary Public renewals are administered by our Notary Department. The public can visit the Notary Department located at 310 Center Drive in Riverhead between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays.



Janice Harkins Dog Talk

On Facebook, I came across the Yellow Dog Project. This is a wonderful idea! This program is to bring to people's attention to giving dogs with a yellow ribbon on their leash space. When I am training a dog, I always tell clients that when approaching another dog always ask if the dog is friendly and if it is ok to touch their dog. You always need to offer your hand to the dog. The way to offer your hand is let them see the inside of your hand (your palm). Never go to pet a dog with your hand coming at them to touch their head. This action can be threatening to a dog and it would be more than understandable if they snapped back at you. You do not want to give the dog the impression that you are trying to attack them or their owner. The Yellow Dog Project is a really smart idea to indicate to people to give your dog distance. This is a program that I hope really gets out there. There are many reasons to use this yellow ribbon on your dog's leash such as health issues, scared or reactive to other dog's or people, and being rehabilitated. Personally, I would not use this idea to state a dog is in training. If you are training your dog and you think another person or dogs actions are going to cause you issues well then your training is not going to work out. Training needs distractions. Any dog can be trained in a house or at a location with no distractions. Unfortunately, if there have been no distractions during training, when distractions come in to play you will basically have to restart all of your training. All the work, you will have to redo outside your home or training location to show your dog they have to act currently everywhere. This is a very smart idea "project" to make it more transparent to people to give these dogs their needed space. As preciously stated, never assume any dog wants you to touch them or invade their space. There will be no unnecessary incidents if the proper precautions are always taken. People don't always like to listen and assume they know better. The Yellow Dog Project will make it more transparent to people to show the proper caution. Please share this information with others so this project is understood and recognized.

Send questions to: sspress2000@aol.com, Attention: Dog Talk.

