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HOAX DISTRESS CALLS

The Coast Guard has been inundated with hoax calls more so recently and it has created a great concern. The hoax calls have not been relegated to one particular area but is becoming more universal. As we all know the Coast Guard must respond to all distress calls as though they were real. It is very difficult to determine a hoax from a true case. The ninth District Commander has previously stated; "Hoax calls are serious business this person placed the lives of our boating public and local search and rescue professionals in jeopardy when he made these prank calls. Hoax calls divert resources from legitimate rescue efforts and put our peoples lives in danger- all at the expense of the American public. The actions of anyone making false distress calls should not be taken lightly, and I will continue to do everything in my power to identify offenders and bring them forward for prosecution."

The average cost of conducting a search and rescue is calculated by the hour. A Coast Guard aircraft cost about \$4,000 an hour, and the average cutter costs \$1500 an hour. In some states knowingly and willfully transmitting a hoax distress call is a felony. It is punishable by up to six years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and restitution to the Coast Guard for all costs incurred responding to the distress.

With so many hoaxes occurring, the Auxiliary has been requested to assist by using their direction finding radio capabilities to apprehend the culprits. We as Auxiliarists have the opportunity when teaching the subject on radio, to emphasize the importance of what the effects Hoax calls can have. A father and son died when their vessel sank. They had placed a legitimate distress call at the same time a hoax distress call was received by the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard did not hear the legitimate distress call. This demonstrates the harsh reality of a hoax call. A reminder for all radio watch standers. when you hear a DISTRESS

call(MAYDAY) that is not responded to by the Coast Guard, you MUST notify the Coast Guard immediately after obtaining the ACCURATE POSITION, NATURE OF DISTRESS, and NUMBER OF PERSONS on BOARD. If you hear the distress but are unable to maintain or you lose communications you MUST NOTIFY THE COAST GUARD IMMEDIATELY that you heard a MAYDAY and are unable to communicate with the caller.

Warren Schneider, DVC-OT

Communications Planning – A Key to Successful Operations

Communications occupies a unique position in the Auxiliary in that it is the only specialty that does not have a technically oriented, how-to-do-it training program or text, as does Operations and VE, etc. Yes, the OSC Comms' course includes instruction on how to write messages and use the radio; the OPS POLICY MANUAL includes when and where radios may be used, call signs, and frequencies. However, where in Auxiliary training materials does one find a solution to the situation cited in Comms Bulletin #7? (For those who did not read the Bulletin, a flotilla in Arkansas had to link two VHF land stations. To someone with a cursory knowledge of comms technology, a repeater would be the only answer. Fortunately, communicators – Auxiliarists with a technical knowledge of radio communications – quickly realized that an inexpensive directional antenna would do the job, thus avoiding an expensive repeater together with its inherent liabilities.)

A carefully designed communication's plan, incorporated into an overall operations plan, can greatly enhance operations. In those situations where such a plan is not in place, and being facetious, an assumption is often made that comms' resources will magically appear out of the mist when needed. The reality is that good

communications rely on careful and thorough planning involving both communicators and non-communicators. Working as a team, non-communicators who, for example and for whatever reason, are familiar with Chapter One of the OSC COMMS text, can readily decide whether two radio stations are within direct communications range of each other. If not within range, the communicators can be called upon to bridge the gap. This is not a general discourse on the subject, but rather a heads up to the need for good communications planning. As a starting point, the first thing to be done is to determine if the radio coverage needed within a given AOR is actually available under a number

of various situations that might occur. Consider the simple fact that within the AOR covered by a CG Station or Group, there invariably are areas in shadow where a VHF radio signal from the station will not reach, and vice versa. Is there a need to correct the anomaly?

In futures issues of the Comms Bulletin, elements of communication's planning will be presented for consideration and use by the reader as may be appropriate.

Warren Schneider, DVC-OT

FOR BETTER BOATING SAFETY

FOG

Fog can occur in any season of the year. It develops when the air temperature drops to the dew point, where the moisture in the air condenses. Advection fog is formed when relatively warm moist air passes over a colder surface and is cooled below its dew point. It is the type of fog most likely to be encountered on the water. Radiation fog and steam fog usually occur over the land and small quiet ponds and is usually shallow. It can form when cold moist air passes over a warmer surface. Whatever the type of fog it can be a problem for the navigator. The inability to see navigation aids, obstructions, and other vessels can confound the best vessel operator.

In these days of electronic marvels many recreational vessels are equipped with RADAR which can make navigation safer in limited visibility. With the addition of a good depth sounder and LORAN or G P S the navigator can proceed underway to his desired destination. Proper use of RADAR however, requires some training and practice. One good exercise is to operate the RADAR on a clear day and compare the display on the RADAR screen with what can be seen visually. This will show the significant differences typical of RADAR displays. Some experience with working maneuvering board problems will make understanding what is displayed on the RADAR screen much easier. Having RADAR on board without a knowledgeable operator will not guarantee a safe passage.

Understanding relative motion and the

limitations of RADAR is essential. When fog engulfs those vessels not equipped with Radar extreme caution must be exercised. Such a vessel underway and making way through dense fog is inviting a disaster. The navigation equipment on any vessel, no matter how limited, should be in good working order and properly calibrated. If the only equipment is a magnetic compass, the operator should know the deviation to be expected on each heading. It will then be possible to follow a reasonably accurate course to a safe anchorage away from areas of heavy traffic. This would be especially true if the vessel is in a ship channel when the fog descends. Anchoring and waiting for the fog to lift is in most circumstances the most prudent thing to do. Whether at anchor or underway, proper sound signals in accordance with the Navigation Rules should be made. The vessel operator should also keep a sharp ear out for the sound signals of another vessel. Adhering to the Navigation Rules, exercising caution, and using common sense will reduce the dangers that fog can create.

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