Emergency Operation and Procedures

Most of the information pertaining to emergency operation procedures is contained in the RIC-22 document. Although this document was originally created for the *Restricted Operator's Certificate*, which is no longer being issued, the general information provided is still relevant to **all** radio operators, and continues to be offered for that purpose.

General Information

Below is a summary of the general information relating to emergency communication. More details can be found in the RIC-22 document.

- Emergency conditions are classified in accordance with the degree of danger or hazard.[1)] The procedures for each will be explained further down, but here they are in order priority:
    1. **Distress**: A condition of being threatened by grave and/or imminent danger and requiring immediate assistance. Distress calls have priority over all other types of calls.
    2. **Urgency**: A condition concerning the safety of an aircraft or other vehicle, or of someone on board or within sight, but which does not require immediate assistance. Urgent calls have priority over all other types of calls except distress calls.
    3. **Safety**: An indication that the station calling is about to transmit a message concerning the safety of navigation or important meteorological warnings. Safety calls have priority over regular communication but must yield to distress and urgent calls.
- The first rule to know is that it's forbidden to transmit any false or fraudulent distress call or message of any kind.[2)]
- Normally, all radio stations need to be operated so as not to interfere with other radiocommunications. However, the only situation under which you may interrupt or interfere with the normal working of another station is when you are required to transmit a higher priority message, for example, distress, urgency or other priority calls or messages.[3)]
- Normally, radio operators and all persons who become acquainted with radiocommunications are required to preserve the privacy of those communications, except as permitted by the addressee of the message. However, these restrictions do not apply to a message of distress, urgency, safety or to messages addressed to “ALL STATIONS”.[4)]
- Normally, the base station has control of communications over mobile stations. However, this does not apply in the cases of distress or urgency communications, where control lies with the station initiating the priority call.[5)]

Operating Procedures

Distress Communications

Important Disclaimer: The distress communications procedures outlined below should not

prevent a station in distress from making use of **any means** at its disposal to attract attention, to make known its position, and to obtain assistance.

Sending A Distress Call

In radiotelephony (voice), the spoken word for distress is “MAYDAY” spoken three times and pronounced as the French *m'aider*. In CW (Morse code) it is “SOS”. Since the distress call has absolute priority over all other transmissions, all stations who hear it must immediately cease regular transmission and continue to listen on the frequency.

The distress call should have the following form:

1. “MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY”
2. “THIS IS”
3. `[call sign of the station in distress]` (*spoken three times*).

To interrupt a lower priority conversation to signal a distress call, break-in immediately following the transmission of the active party with the above sequence.

Responding To A Distress Call

If you hear a distress call:

- Immediately stop your contact, acknowledge the emergency call, and determine its location and what assistance may be needed.
- If you are unable to render direct assistance, you should contact authorities and then maintain watch until you are certain that assistance will be forthcoming.
- Continue to monitor the frequency on which the distress message was received and, if possible, establish a continuous watch on appropriate distress and emergency frequencies.
- Notify any station with direction-finding or radar facilities and request assistance unless it is known that this action has been, or will be, taken by the station acknowledging receipt of the distress message.
- Cease all transmissions that may interfere with the distress traffic.

To acknowledge the receipt of a distress message, use the following form:

1. “MAYDAY” (*only once*)
2. `[call sign of the station in distress]` (*spoken three times*)
3. “THIS IS”
4. `[your call sign]` (*spoken three times*)
5. “RECEIVED MAYDAY”.

Urgency Communications

The urgency signal indicates that the station calling has a very urgent message to transmit concerning the safety of

a station or a person, but does not require immediate assistance. The urgency signal and message may be addressed to all stations or to a specific station.

Sending an Urgency Signal

The urgency signal is the word “PAN PAN” spoken three times and can be addressed to “ALL STATIONS” or to a specific station.

The urgency call should have the following form:

1. “PAN PAN, PAN PAN, PAN PAN”
2. `[the name of the station addressed]` or the words “ALL STATIONS” (*three times*)
3. “THIS IS”
4. `[your call sign]`
5. `[the nature of the urgency condition and other useful information]`

Responding To An Urgency Call

The urgency signal has priority over all other communications except distress.

Stations that hear the urgency signal shall continue to listen for at least three minutes on the frequency which the signal was heard. After that, if no urgency message has been heard, stations may resume normal service. All stations that hear the urgency signal must take care not to interfere with the urgency message that follows.

Safety Communications

The safety signal is used mainly in the maritime mobile service. It indicates that the station calling is about to transmit a message concerning the safety of navigation or important meteorological warnings.

The safety signal is the word “SECURITE” spoken three times and pronounced as the French *sécurité* and can be addressed to “ALL STATIONS” or to a specific station.

Sending an Safety Signal

The safety call should have the following form:

1. “SECURITE, SECURITE, SECURITE”
2. `[the station addressed]` or “ALL STATIONS” (*repeated three times*)
3. “THIS IS”
4. `[your call sign]`
5. `[the nature of the condition]`
6. `[your call sign]`

Other Emergency Considerations

- It's a good idea to have a way to operate your amateur station without using commercial AC power lines so you may provide communications in an emergency.
- The most important accessory to have for a hand-held radio in an emergency is several sets of charged batteries.
- A portable dipole antenna is a good choice to have as part of a portable HF amateur station that could be set up in case of an emergency.

> In a real or simulated emergency, a person operating radio apparatus in the amateur radio service may only communicate with a radio station that is in the amateur radio service in order to transmit a message that relates to the real or simulated emergency on behalf of a person, government or relief organization. [6)]

Example

Here's a real MAYDAY call and exchange found on the Mayday Wikipedia page.

Questions

- B-002-008-001 → B-002-008-011

1) RIC-22, Sec 3.1 and RIC-22, Sec 5.1
2) RIC-22, Sec. 3.5
3) RIC-22, Sec 3.4
4) RIC-22, Sec. 3.2
5) RIC-22, Sec. 3.3
6) See RIC-3, Sec 6, p.18 and SOR-96-484 Sec 48