



## **Marine Distress Guidelines**

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### **1.0 Authority and Responsibility**

This procedure has been prepared for the guidance and use of the boating community on Lac Deschenes. There is no guarantee that the information below is correct and up to date at any particular time, it is the users responsibility to check that he/she is aware of the current status of communications and rescue services.

### **2.0 Objectives & Principles**

Boating on Lac Deschenes is generally considered a safe sport, however serious and not so serious marine accidents can happen. The objective of this procedural guideline is to recommend the actions and responsibilities of boaters and those on shore which should be followed when marine accidents are reported.

### **3.0 Legal Background**

#### **3.1 Canada Shipping Act**

Under the Canada Shipping Act masters of boats on the water, who become aware that another boat in the vicinity requires assistance, are legally required to do so as long as the assistance can be rendered without peril to the safety of the crew and ship offering assistance. There are legal ramifications re salvage at sea, which are complex and beyond the scope of this procedure. Hence it is recommended that the masters of the assistance rendering and receiving vessels sign a written contract to agree on compensation and liability waivers. If a written contract is not feasible, then a verbal contract can be executed, which preferably should be witnessed via radio with a witness on shore. The Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) has advised that it is prepared to act as radio witness.

#### **3.2 Marine Radio Communications**

CCG regulations do not require pleasure craft to be equipped with a VHF Maritime Radio Telephone, but they highly recommend it. However if the pleasure craft is equipped with a VHF, then the operator should possess the "Restricted Operator Certificate-Maritime" (ROC-M). An exception is made during emergency situations when anyone is allowed to make distress calls over VHF radio. It is important that all parties involved in an emergency have proficiency in Mayday and PanPan calls. In the course of an emergency Ch16 is to be kept clear for emergency communications and no hailing traffic is permitted.

It is recommended that the holder of the ROC-M provides basic instruction to other crew members aboard on the procedures for Mayday/PanPan emergency calls. This would be crucial if the ROC-M holder became incapacitated during an emergency.

### **3.3 Sailing Club liability insurance**

Local sailing club insurance contracts with their insurance provider generally allow club members to render assistance using club resources to members only. The maximum amount of liability is limited to around 3 million dollars. Assistance to third parties should be referred to official rescue services except where item 3.1 applies.

## **4.0 Resources Available to offer Assistance**

### **4.1 Canadian Coast Guard**

The Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) has no rescue resources available in the Greater Ottawa area. Its key role for Lac Deschenes boaters is that it monitors VHF CH 16 on a 24/7 basis. This service is provided by the Marine Communications and Traffic Service Centre (MCTS) based in Prescott. Boaters however should be aware that the nearest MCTS VHF repeater is located in Cardinal, some 10 Km east of Prescott and due to the nature of VHF radio propagation, reception is not guaranteed on the entire section of the Ottawa River of interest to boaters. The CCG can also be contacted in an emergency by dialling \*16 on a Cell Phone.

When the MCTS centre receives an emergency call, they will relay the request to the appropriate local emergency resources. In rare cases will they alert the Search and Rescue (SAR) centre in Trenton, who at their discretion can dispatch helicopters or SAR aircraft.

### **4.2 Ottawa Fire Service**

The Ottawa Fire Service (OFS) is the prime marine rescue service on the Ontario side of the Ottawa River. They cooperate closely with the Gatineau Service and boaters should not concern themselves with the exact location of the provincial boundary during a distress: the two services have a protocol worked out who will respond.

The Ottawa Fire Service has a broad mandate by the City of Ottawa to respond to almost any type of emergency ranging from life and death situations to minor events like loss of propulsion or boat aground in soft mud.

The OFS operates marine rescue units with trained staff from several Fire Stations in Ottawa, but the one of most interest to Lac Deschenes boaters is located in Firehall #22 on Richmond Road near Lincoln Heights. The Ottawa Fire Service does not monitor marine VHF CH16

### **4.3 Gatineau Police and Fire Department**

The Gatineau Fire Service (GFS) is the prime marine rescue service on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River and like OFS are prepared to respond to almost all requests for assistance. As mentioned before, they cooperate closely with OFS and boaters in distress can rely on either Fire Service to provide assistance.

The GFS operates the marine rescue unit out of the Aylmer Fire hall and uses the Aylmer Marina to launch their boats. The GFS does not monitor VHF Ch16.

The Gatineau Police are frequently on the water for Law Enforcement purposes. If a rescue request comes in while they are on the river, they will also respond and offer assistance.

## 4.4 Nepean Sailing Club

NSC has no suitable vessels for marine rescue. NSC however may monitor VHF Ch16 and Ch68 during hours of operation. Ch16 should only be used for emergency calls, as Ch68 is the allocated channel for ship to shore communications.

## 5.0 Methods of Communication

### 5.1 VHF Marine Radio

According to the CCG the VHF Radio Telephone system is the principal system for emergency communication in Canadian inland and offshore waters. VHF has the advantage that all ships and shore based rescue services in the vicinity can hear the initial emergency call and listen to subsequent communications to ensure that immediate and proper assistance is dispatched. Other boaters can also offer relay service when the call is not directly received by shore based rescue resources.

In view of the above, it is highly recommended that boaters equip their boat with an operational VHF radio and monitor Ch16 when someone is on the boat.

### 5.2 Cellular telephone

A cellular telephone is not a good substitute for a marine radio telephone. The cellular network is a party-to-party system and the benefit of the broadcast nature of VHF radio telephone cannot be obtained in an emergency situation. However it is recognized that many boaters own a cellular telephone and if a VHF radio is not available, then it is a good alternative in an emergency.

Boaters and sailing/yacht club staff should be aware that cellular (and wireline) 911 calls may only be placed in life threatening emergencies. In all other cases rescue services should be called on their regular dispatch telephone numbers as follows:

Ottawa Fire Service	613-232-1551
Gatineau Fire Service	819-684-2222
Nepean Sailing Club	613-829-6462
Britannia Yacht Club	613-828-5167
Ottawa Dive Service	613-821-3988

It is highly recommended that boaters program these numbers in the directory of their Cell Phone.

Cellular 911 calls can be received by either Ottawa or Gatineau 911 dispatch centres depending on the vessels location and the cellular basestation location of the subscriber's service provider. This is of no concern to the boater as both 911 centres have agreed to take the call and will decide between them to dispatch the most appropriate rescue resources.

Vessels in an emergency can also dial \*16 on their cellular phone to contact the CCG.

Rescue authorities also recommend that cell phone owners enter ICE (In Case of Emergency) numbers in their phone directory. For instance an entry like "ICE Parents 613-555-1212" would provide the parents phone number.

## 5.3 Visual

A vessel in emergency can make visual distress signals as follows

- Pyrotechnic flares
- Raise and lower outstretched arms repeatedly
- Signal the SOS Morse code with a flashlight (dot dot dot dash dash dash dot dot dot)
- Continuous sounding with a foghorn or similar device

## 6.0 Marine Distress Procedures

### 6.1 General Rule

All boaters must have their boats equipped with safety equipment in accordance with the size of their boat. A list of required safety items can be found in the booklet "Safe Boating Guide" published by the Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans. (See Appendix A-1)

Boaters should inspect the expiry date of Fire Extinguishers and Pyrotechnics at the beginning of each season and replace if necessary.

While it is strictly speaking not required to carry pyrotechnics on board while navigating the Ottawa River between Britannia and Chatts Falls as almost all navigable water is within 1 mile of shore, it is recommended that boaters carry them anyway. This recommendation applies particularly to boaters who plan to engage in night sailing.

Boaters should inspect their ground tackle at the beginning of each season and ensure that it will hold the vessel in 60+ knot storm gusts. Information on the safe holding power of anchor types, rode and chain diameters can be found on the websites of major marine retailers

### 6.2 Life-threatening emergencies

Life-threatening emergencies include potential loss of vessel. The master of the boat should originate a Mayday call on VHF radio (providing position and nature of the emergency), dial 911 on the cell phone or make visual distress signals.

As outlined in para3.1 other boats in the area are legally obliged to offer assistance. Other boaters should monitor Ch16 for response by rescue authorities and offer relay service if necessary. Normally CCG will organize dispatch of rescue services.

The Ottawa or Gatineau Fire service will dispatch their Marine Rescue units and if necessary Ambulance service

### 6.3 Serious, but non-life-threatening emergencies

Non-life-threatening emergencies can range from aground in hard bottom, rudder disabled, no-propulsion-and-anchor-is-dragging to medical issues like open wound requiring stitches.

The master of the boat should make a PanPan call on VHF radio, call the nearest emergency service on its landline number by cell phone or make visual distress signals. As per para3.1 other boaters in the vicinity are legally required to offer assistance. Normally CCG will organize dispatch of rescue services.

The Ottawa or Gatineau Fire service will dispatch their Marine Rescue units.

## 6.4 Minor emergencies

Minor emergencies are everything else. Typical situations are “ran out of fuel”, or aground in soft bottom. Boaters should attempt to clear their problem first without calling for assistance.

If there is enough wind, a sailboat without mechanical propulsion can attempt to make it to Nepean Sailing Club (NSC) base and dock on the North side of the Able Sail dock. The manager is responsible to keep this section of dock clear for emergency tie-ups. It is acceptable to hail the NSC by radio (Ch68) or Cell phone to request docking assistance. Sailing to the assigned slip in harbour or to the NSC service dock is not permitted

A sailboat aground in soft mud should attempt to kedge itself afloat again. The manager or senior bosun at one of the local clubs (see above for phone numbers) may decide to scout for a volunteer member to assist with kedging. The club boat may be used for transport of volunteers and kedging anchor, but under no circumstance may the club boat be used for towing or other salvage operations.

In general club members are encouraged to call their base first and explain the nature of the emergency. The staff on duty will assess if volunteer members can effectively deal with the problem or otherwise will refer the emergency to the Ottawa or Gatineau Fire Service.

## 6.5 Boat Fire in Yard or Harbour

In case of a boat fire in a yard or harbour, boaters and staff should be aware of the extreme danger due the likelihood of exploding propane or fuel tanks as well as the toxicity of burning fibre glass and other chemical compounds commonly used in boat construction.

The recommended procedure is to immediately raise a fire alarm. Note that five short blasts with the ships sound signalling device (air horn) are the standard distress signal. Also have someone call 911 without delay. After the alarm is raised an attempt can be made to extinguish the fire with the ships or locally provided fire extinguishers. However if it appears that the fire cannot be controlled, staff or members should clear everyone from the source of the fire by a safe distance e.g. at least 100 meter to avoid being hit by flying debris from a potential explosion.

## **Appendices**

### **A.1 Safe Boating Guide**

The Safe Boating Guide can be downloaded at <http://www.tc.gc.ca/MarineSafety/TP/TP511/menu.htm>

### **A.2 Britannia Yacht Club**

BYC has authorised qualified staff and members to use the committee boat to offer assistance to boats that appear to be in trouble and headed for the Britannia Rapids. Members and staff are instructed to arrange for a written or verbal contract before rendering assistance. All other rescue cases are relayed to the official rescue services. BYC does not monitor VHF Ch16.

### **A.3 Club de Voile de Grande Riviere. (Aylmer Yacht Club)**

CVGR has no suitable rescue vessels and has instructed members and staff not to offer any assistance due to legal liability concerns. CVGR does not monitor CH16.

### **A.4 Ottawa Dive Service**

Ottawa Dive Service (ODS) can offer commercial salvage on a fee basis, but will normally not respond to an emergency call as their resources are typically not close enough to be useful.