

VHF Distress, Urgency and Safety with MMSI Alerts

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is a UN body responsible for defining the communications capabilities and protocols to support GMDSS. The ITU is responsible for defining the format and content of distress, urgency and safety calls. With the spread of DSC capable radios, the ITU has modified the standard voice based calls to include an MMSI when the initial alert is sent via DSC. This year in Canada you may have heard distress, urgency or safety calls that included an MMSI number. The following information is taken from the ITU publication defining the format for distress, urgency and safety alerts and messages.

Distress Communications

The ITU defined format of a distress alert and message, sent on VHF channel 16, is defined as follows:

Distress call:

- the distress signal *MAYDAY*, spoken three times;
- the words *THIS IS*;
- the name of the vessel in distress, spoken three times;
- the call sign or other identification;
- the MMSI (if the initial alert has been sent by DSC).

Distress Message:

- the distress signal *MAYDAY*;
- the name of the vessel in distress;
- the call sign or other identification;
- the MMSI (if the initial alert has been sent by DSC);
- the position, given as the latitude and longitude, or if the latitude and longitude are not known or if time is insufficient, in relation to a known geographical location;
- the nature of the distress;
- the kind of assistance required;
- any other useful information.

Distress relay call:

The distress call relay sent by a vessel should be sent by voice radiotelephony and should be given in the following form:

- the distress signal *MAYDAY RELAY*, spoken three times;
- *ALL STATIONS* or coast station name, as appropriate, spoken three times;
- the words *THIS IS*;
- the name of the relaying station, spoken three times;
- the call sign or other identification of the relaying station;
- the MMSI (if the initial alert has been sent by DSC) of the relaying station (the vessel not in distress).

This call shall be followed by a distress message, which shall, as far as possible, repeat the information contained in the original distress alert or distress message

Distress message acknowledgement:

When acknowledging by radiotelephony the receipt of a distress alert or a distress call from a ship station or a ship earth station, the acknowledgement should be given in the following form:

- the distress signal *MAYDAY*;
- the name followed by the call sign, or the MMSI or other identification of the station sending the distress message;
- the words *THIS IS*;
- the name and call sign or other identification of the station acknowledging receipt;
- the word *RECEIVED*;
- the distress signal *MAYDAY*

Cancelling distress traffic:

In radiotelephony, the message indicating that distress traffic has ceased on the frequencies in use should consist of:

- the distress signal *MAYDAY*;
- the call “*ALL STATIONS*”, spoken three times;
- the words *THIS IS*;
- the name of the station sending that message, spoken three times;
- the call sign or other identification of the station sending the message;
- the time of handing in of the message;
- the MMSI (if the initial alert has been sent by DSC), the name and the call sign of the mobile station which was in distress;
- the words *SEELONCE FEENEE* pronounced as the French words “*silence fini*”.

Urgency Communications

The **urgency call** should consist of:

- the urgency signal *PAN PAN*, spoken three times;
- the name of the called station or “*all stations*”, spoken three times;
- the words *THIS IS*;
- the name of the station transmitting the urgency message, spoken three times;
- the call sign or any other identification;
- the MMSI (if the initial announcement has been sent by DSC),

This call is followed by the urgency message or followed by the details of the channel to be used for the message in the case where a working channel is to be used.

The **urgency cancellation** should consist of:

- the urgency signal *PAN PAN*, spoken three times;
- “*all stations*”, spoken three times;
- the words *THIS IS*;
- the name of the station transmitting the urgency message, spoken three times;
- the call sign or any other identification;
- the MMSI (if the initial announcement has been sent by DSC);
- *PLEASE CANCEL URGENCY MESSAGE OF time in UTC.*

Safety Communications

The **safety call** should consist of

- the safety signal *SECURITE*, spoken three times;
- the name of the called station or “*all stations*”, spoken three times;
- the words *THIS IS*;
- the name of the station transmitting the safety message, spoken three times;
- the call sign or any other identification;
- the MMSI (if the initial announcement has been sent by DSC),

The safety call is followed by the safety message or followed by the details of the channel to be used for the message in the case where a working channel is to be used.

On the selected working frequency, the safety call and message should consist of:

- the safety signal *SECURITE*, spoken three times;
- the name of the called station or “*all stations*”, spoken three times;
- the words *THIS IS*;
- the name of the station transmitting the safety message, spoken three times;
- the call sign or any other identification;
- the MMSI (if the initial alert has been sent by DSC);
- the text of the safety message.