



Calling for help from the RHIB

Introduction

In a distress situation on the RHIB getting help is essentially a two phase process. You need to do different things in the different phases

- **The initial alert:** In this phase you are trying to get the attention of potential rescuers who are not necessarily looking out for a vessel in distress
- **The 'final mile':** In this phase you are guiding rescuers who are now actively looking for you to your precise location

Equipment carried

Hornet carries the following distress alerting equipment, which should be checked at the beginning of each voyage

- Main VHF radio, equipped with Digital Selective Calling (DSC) and connected to the GPS
- Secondary, waterproof handheld radio, equipped with DSC and with independent power supply and GPS
- Electronic Visual Distress Signal (EVDS)
- Pyrotechnic flares:
 - Parachute flares (used for initial alert)
 - Red handheld flares (used for final mile)
 - Orange smokes (used mainly for final mile—may be useful for initial alert if an aircraft is heading towards the vessel)

In addition, it is possible that other equipment carried by individuals will be available, including

- Personal Locator Beacon (PLB)
- Dive torches—can be used to flash S O S signal
- Whistles
- Flags

Initial alert

The following options are useful in raising the initial alert. They are listed in descending order of preference, based on their likely effectiveness, speed of response, and the risks involved in using them.

- Make a distress call using DSC on the main VHF radio, following up with a Mayday call on channel 16
- Make a distress call using DSC on the handheld VHF radio, following up with a Mayday call on channel 16
- If anyone onboard has a Personal Locator Beacon, deploy it
- Fire parachute flares (ideally two separated by a short interval)
- In very specific circumstances (e.g. if an aircraft is heading towards the boat) the use of an orange smoke may also be valuable

Final mile

In the 'final mile' phase of a search, (i.e. guiding a rescue team to the precise location of the boat) the options are different. Which is preferable will depend on context, so they are listed in no particular order, but include

- Maintain radio contact with rescuers and follow their instructions
- Use the Electronic Visual Distress Signal (EVDS)
- Use torches to attract attention. Ideally torches should be used to send an S O S Morse Code sequence as this is a recognised distress signal
- Use whistles, flags etc
- Make use of red hand held flares or orange smokes

Being prepared

Ensuring the best chance of being able to summon help in an emergency requires planning and preparation. The following points should be noted

- Both the main and handheld radios should be checked daily, either by notifying the Coast Guard of your plan, or by requesting a radio check from another vessel or from the National Coastwatch Institute (NCI). The NCI can be contacted on channel 65 in many areas. If either radio is not functioning you should abandon the voyage.
- The handheld radio should be kept turned on and attached to the cox whilst at sea. This maximises the chance of it being available in the case of a catastrophic event such as a capsized. Keeping the radio turned on will minimise any delay in acquiring a GPS lock, enabling a precise position to be broadcast quickly.
- [Current BSAC guidance](#) is that the cox should wear a lifejacket or buoyancy aid at all times, even if wearing a zipped up drysuit. This advice should be followed. Lifejackets generally have a strap which is suitable for clipping the handheld radio to.
- The handheld radio should be charged every night. In the event of the rechargeable battery running down it is possible to power the radio with 5 AAA alkaline batteries. A spare set of AAA batteries should be carried as a precaution in a readily accessible location.
- The Dive Manager and cox should give careful thought to where the flares and the EVDS are stowed to maximise the chance of being able to retrieve them in an emergency. The

locker at the front of the console is unlikely to be easily accessible in the event of capsizing. The same is true of the boxes on the A frame if they are not thrown clear during the capsizing, which they may not be. A grab bag secured at tube level and near the edge of the vessel may be easiest to access following a capsizing.

- Briefly activate the EVDS at the beginning of each trip to check that it is working and the batteries are good. In order to preserve the batteries please avoid leaving it on for any longer than needed to perform a very quick check
- The Dive Manager **must** incorporate information about calling for help into their SEEDS brief. It is vital that everyone on board is familiar with
 - How to make a DSC distress call
 - How to follow the DSC distress call up with a voice Mayday call on channel 16
 - Where safety equipment is stowed
 - How to deploy flares both effectively and safely. Deploying flares in a crowded RHIB brings a significant risk of personal injury or further damage to the boat if not done appropriately.

Using flares safely

Flares are explosive devices which burn extremely hot. If it becomes necessary to deploy flares it is important to bear the following points in mind in order to minimise the risk of further injury

- Flares should always be deployed downwind of the boat
- Handheld flares should be held out over the side of the boat and at arms length
- Wear gloves—they can get hot
- Dispose of the spent flares overboard—they will be hot
- Do not release parachute flares if there is an aircraft in the vicinity
- Do not use flares if there is a fuel leak or spilt fuel
- Avoid using flares whilst a casualty is being given oxygen