

# FACT SHEET: COMMUNICATIONS

## If you can't call for help, we can't rescue you.

- The ability to communicate distress if you end up in the water is just as important in preventing fatalities as wearing lifejackets.
- Not carrying reliable communications equipment is one of the key risk factors for boating fatalities. The other key risks are: not wearing lifejackets, not checking the weather, and drinking alcohol.
- Research commissioned by the NZ Safer Boating Forum (formerly the National Pleasure Boat Safety Forum) found effective communications equipment was likely to have prevented 58% of boating fatalities within the surveyed cases. *Source: NPBSF 2006*
- It is important to carry at least two forms of reliable communications equipment when out boating in case one form does not work. Cellphones do not always have coverage out at sea and are susceptible to moisture. A marine radio fixed to your boat is of no use if the boat has sunk or you are separated from the vessel.
- For vessels 6m or under where the risk of capsizing is higher, communications equipment needs to work when wet and, at least one should be hand-held (or attached to your lifejacket).

### What the latest research shows

- Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) figures show 24 people died in recreational boating accidents in New Zealand waters in 2015. A total of 11 people have died in recreational boating accidents in 2016 (as at 19 December 2016).
- Two-thirds (64%) of all recreational vessel users said it was very important to carry at least two ways to call for help. However, only one-half (55%) of all recreational vessel users actually carried two ways of calling for help every time they went out. *Source: Research NZ 2016*
- Almost one-third (23%) stated they never carried at least two ways to call for help when they went out boating. *Source: Research NZ 2016*
- Nearly all recreational vessels users (95%) reported carrying at least one way to call for help. *Source: Research NZ 2016*
- A cellphone in a waterproof bag was the most commonly carried communication device (60%), marine radio fixed to the vessel (43%), followed by flares (40%), a cellphone not in a plastic bag (31%) and a distress beacon (29%). *Source: Research NZ 2016*
- Larger vessel users were significantly more likely to carry at least two forms of communication than smaller vessel users (84% of power boat users and 78% of sail boat users, compared with 28% of other vessel users and 21% of kayakers/canoers). *Source: Research NZ 2016*

### What the law requires

- Some regional bylaws include requirements for skippers to carry communications equipment. Boaties are encouraged to check local bylaws before going out.

## **The NZ Safer Boating Forum and Maritime New Zealand's position**

- The NZ Safer Boating Forum is a network of government agencies, local body groups and marine industry associations and publications that promotes recreational boating safety in New Zealand.
- MNZ and the Forum recommend that all skippers carry at least two forms of reliable communications equipment.

## **Types of communications equipment**

Different types of communications equipment work in different areas, so you need to make sure the types of communications equipment will work in the areas you are boating in. You should carry at least two of the following at all times, so you can get help in the event of an emergency:

- Distress beacons – PLBs (personal locator beacons) or EPIRBs (emergency position-indicating radio beacons) are for maritime use and are designed to float in water. Some can be attached to your vessel while others can be hand-held (around the size of a mobile phone) and/or clipped to your lifejacket.
- Hand-held VHF radio (Channel 16) – a hand-held waterproof radio is recommended so you can speak to rescue authorities and anyone in the area who could help. In the event of a capsize, a radio attached to the boat will not be accessible. VHF coverage is available in most areas, but not all.
- Cellphone (call 111) – keep it on you and keep it dry! The problem with a cellphone (compared with a VHF radio) is that you can only ring one person at a time, they will only work when dry, and only get coverage in certain areas. Make sure you put all cellphones in ziplock plastic bags before heading out.
- Flares – can be used to draw rescuers' attention.

## **Registering your distress beacon**

- Distress beacons should be registered with the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand. This assists the rescue team in finding you and is a legal requirement.
- A registered beacon means a quicker, more targeted response can be launched. In some cases it also means that an unnecessary rescue is not launched if your beacon is activated by accident.
- Registration is free. To register your beacon, phone 0508 406 111, email [406registry@maritimenz.govt.nz](mailto:406registry@maritimenz.govt.nz) or visit [www.beacons.org.nz](http://www.beacons.org.nz).

*For more information, contact MNZ's media line on 04 499 7318 or go to <http://maritimenz.govt.nz/Recreational-Boating/Communications-equipment>*