

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. A VHF marine radio is your best two-way communication device at sea. Cellphones generally can't provide ship to ship safety communications or communications with rescue vessels. 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 NZ figures show 31 people died in recreational boating accidents in New Zealand waters in 2014-15 (June to June), 16 people in both 2015-16 and 2016-17, and 11 people in 2017-18.
- Research carried out by Maritime NZ showed 91% of boaties carried at least one way to call for help, but only 79% of those had waterproof communications equipment. *Source: Maritime NZ On-the-water Survey, 2018*
- Only (43%) of all boaties carried two ways of calling for help every time they went out (this was an increase on 2017 (38%) but still lower than 2016 (55%)). However, the number of those who never carry at least two ways to call for help has declined slightly over the past year (10% vs 12%). *Source: IPSOS NZ 2018*
- The number of people reporting taking a marine radio with them or on their vessel has remained the same since 2017 (25%), compared to 43% in 2016. *Source: IPSOS NZ 2018*
- The number of boaties who take PLBs on board is continuing to rise (49% vs 42% in 2017) but a third of these boaties don't know whether their PLB is registered. *Source: IPSOS NZ 2018*
- A cellphone in a plastic bag was the most commonly carried communication device (55%), followed by flares (27%), and a VHF radio (25%). *Source: IPSOS NZ 2018*
- Larger vessel users were significantly more likely to carry at least two forms of communication than smaller vessel users (66% of large power boat and 63% of sail boat users, compared with 28% of kayakers and 23% of stand-up paddle boarders). *Source: IPSOS NZ 2018*

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 NZ'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.
- Maritime NZ 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:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 cell phones in ziplock plastic bags before heading out, but please note that not all smart phones can be used in a bag.
- 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 or visit www.beacons.org.nz.

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