

# Monrovia Regional Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRMRCC)



## Effective Communication During Mass Rescue Operations



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## Introduction

The word 'communication' may be defined in several ways. For our purposes it refers to the successful transfer of information – instructions, reports, questions and suggestions – without delay, misunderstanding, repetition or omission, so that all who need that information acquire it rapidly and understand it fully.

**During MRO, there is a great deal of information that is to be exchanged and it is of vital importance that it flows efficiently and quickly.**

The right people need to be alerted, as soon as possible, to the need for an MRO; they need to be able to understand their part in it; and they need to be given both the information they require to play that part and the means to ask questions and make suggestions and reports. They need to understand the priorities; they need to have access to communications systems; and they need to understand how the planned communications structure works.

Effective communications support distress alerting, coordination and locating functions by allowing:

- ❖ Those in distress to alert the SAR system
- ❖ The SAR system to respond and conduct its mission
- ❖ Survivors to help SAR units respond and conduct rescue

In times of crisis such as a distress situation involving a good number of individuals, emotion, anxiety, and stress reach their highest peak.

The nearly unique humanitarian and non-political nature of SAR is an inherent advantage in fostering cooperation and involvement of others. (IAMSAR Manual vol.1, organization and management, 2016 edition.

- 'Communication' underpins the whole response – at the planning stage, during the incident itself, and afterwards, when lessons can be learned. Without effective communication there is no effective planning, coordination, command or control. And, without effective communication, we will not be able to improve our response (individually, organizationally, nationally, regionally or globally) so that more lives are saved next time – for there will always be a 'next time'. The need for good communication is obvious.

### *REDUCING RESPONSE TIME*

- The most important element in improving the effectiveness of SAR services is the reduction in the elapsed time between when an incident occurs, and when the persons in distress are rescued.

- Ensure that distress communications are always recognized and handled as higher priority than logistic, administrative, and routine operational communications.
- Where practicable, enable SAR personnel to communicate directly with potential craft/vessel in distress.
- Provide comprehensive distress communications throughout Search and Rescue Regions (SRR) especially along the coast.

➤ *Important Factors for SAR Communications*

- The following sectors discuss some important factors that affect the quality and usefulness of communications

❖ *PRIORITY RELIABILITY, AND AVAILABILITY*

- To reduce delays and improve the value of communications, systems must be improved on an end-to-end basis, what matters is the overall timeliness and quality of communications from their source to the final destinations. Therefore, all sea, land, air and space segments must be examined to eliminate weak links, delays and deterioration of quality;
- **Priority or procedure** deals with the process of handling messages and other communications signals related to SAR. In particular, distress messages should always have precedence i.e., be processed before all other communications.
- **Reliability** is a measure of whether equipment and systems used by persons in distress and providers of SAR services are in good condition whenever they are needed. Because of the time-critical nature of SAR services, communications must work well at all times during search and rescue efforts especially Mass Rescue Operations.
- **Availability** refers to the SAR provider's access to equipment. Not only must the equipment work well, but it must also be available to all parties involved at all times. Communications must be able to take place reliably and quickly between the distressed and the SAR system.

**Geography** should also be considered in setting up a communications system during MROs; terrain, distances and other geographic factors can limit the types of equipment or methods which will be effective during MROs.

**GENERAL OPERATING REQUIREMENTS FOR SAR COMMUNICATIONS INCLUDE:**

*(a) Timely delivery of alerts:* Fast delivery of alert messages to the responsible RCC is crucial for successful rescues.

Alerts from aeronautical or maritime communications equipment must be passed on to the responsible RCC directly and quickly.

*(b) Complete and easy to understand alerts:* Information in all preformatted data alert message fields must be complete, accurate, and easy to understand. Alerts with coded or missing data, wrong aircraft or vessel identities or positions, false alerts etc., are detrimental to lifesaving.

However, RCCs are to consider every alert received to be related to a real distress, promptly respond to it until it is proven beyond all reasonable doubt that this alert is false.

Antonov – Abidjan – 14/10/17



## ***DISTRESS COMMUNICATIONS***

- Distress traffic includes all messages relating to immediate assistance required by persons, aircraft, or maritime craft in distress, including medical assistance. Distress traffic may also include SAR communication and on-scene communications. Distress calls take absolute priority over all other transmissions, any one receiving a distress call must immediately cease any transmissions which may interfere with the call and listen on the frequency used for the call.
- Distress and safety communications require the highest possible integrity and protection from harmful interference. Any interference which puts at risk the operation of safety services or degrade, obstructs or interrupts any radio communication is harmful. Some frequencies are protected, in that they have no authorized uses other than for distress and safety. SAR personnel should be the last of all people to cause harmful interference and should co-operate with law-enforcement authorities to report and stop incidents of interference.
- Distress alerts may arrive at RCCs from a variety of equipment sources and via a variety of alerting posts. Alerting posts include , but are not limited to coast radio stations (CRSs); Local User Terminals (LUTs); and Mission Control Centers (MCCs); of the Cospas-Sarsat system; Land Earth Stations (LES); of the Inmarsat System; Air Traffic Services (ATS) units.
- Public Safety Units such as police and fire departments and vessels, aircrafts, or other persons or facilities which may receive and relay such alerts. Alerting posts are any intermediary facilities which relay distress alerts between their source and the responsible RCC, and may even include other RCCs.
- Air craft or vessels in distress may use any means available to attract attention, make their position known, and obtain help.

On 29 Nov. 2015, 30 crew members were rescued from a fishing vessel off the coast of Ivory Coast. With effective communication among the Monrovia Mrcc, MRSC Abidjan and the Ivorian Navy, the United Nations Mission in the Ivory Coast at the time (UNOCI), 30 lives were saved.



An exercise conducted recently in Monrovia provided an opportunity to highlight the essential role effective communication plays in maritime crises management. The exercise brought together individuals from a broad spectrum of Liberia Safety and Security Sectors as well as other partners in the region. They included the Liberia National Police, Liberia National Coast Guard, Fishery Authority, Fire Service, Immigration Service, as well as partners from the MMCC zone F and the GoGIN project. Using effective communication as a tool, these various departments were able to cooperate and coordinate and successfully brought the situation to a logical conclusion.

## CONCLUSION

A Mass Rescue Operation (MRO) is one that involves a need for immediate assistance to large numbers of persons in distress such that capabilities normally available to SAR authorities are inadequate.

It is therefore necessary to plan to enhance SAR capability in MROs. Three means of doing so are to:

- Agree to share SAR facilities regionally and/or internationally;
- Identify additional SAR facilities locally, including shipping in the area; and
- Extend survival time by providing support to persons in distress until they can be rescued.

MROs will bring together organizations at sea and on land, who do not usually work together, it is vital that these organizations communicate effectively at all stages – before and after an MRO as well as during the operations.

Effective communication begins long before any MRO at the planning stage, and also post—incident analysis to improve arrangements based on the experience gained.

Thank you