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Visual Distress Signals

Most often when you experience a problem or are in trouble on your vessel, you make a distress call via your VHF radiotelephone. However, there may be situations where you may not have an opportunity to make a distress call. That's why you are required to carry visual distress signals. And, that's why you need devices that will alert others in the area that you are in distress.

The distress signals required are based on the area in which you operate, and must be approved by the U.S. Coast Guard.

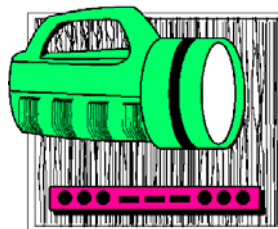
<u>Area of Operation</u>	<u>Devices Required</u> (approval series)
Oceans, over 50 miles from the coastline	3 parachute flares (160.136) 6 hand flares (160.121) 3 smoke signals (160.122)
Oceans, 3-50 miles from the coastline; or more than 3 miles from the coastline on the Great Lakes	3 parachute flares (160.136 or 160.036) 6 hand flares (160.121 or 160.021) 3 smoke signals (160.122, 160.022 or 160.037)
Coastal waters, excluding Great Lakes; or within 3 miles of the coastline on the Great Lakes	Night: one S.O.S. electric light (161.013), <i>plus</i> Day: one flag (160.072), <i>or</i> 3 approved smoke signals; <i>or</i> 3 approved flares for both day and night

Flares and smoke signals are considered pyrotechnic-type devices. Extreme care should be exercised if they have to be used. They burn with intense heat and can cause se-

vere burns if not used properly. Be sure to read the manufacturer's instructions for safe and effective use long before you need to use them. The entire crew should be familiar with their proper use. Many shore-side training classes include practice using flairs. This is highly recommended. You wouldn't want your first experience to be in an emergency.

Do not use all flairs at once. If no one is in sight, fire off one flare in an attempt to draw attention from someone beyond your line of sight. Wait for a visual response before setting off another device to again show your location.

If you observe a flare, report it to the Coast Guard. Note your position and the bearing of the flare from your vessel. Estimate the angle above the horizon and note if the flare rose and fell at the same speed or not. This information will help in narrowing down the search area



Electric distress lights and flags are non-pyrotechnic devices. Their range of visibility is more limited than flares, but they can be used almost continuously.

Visual distress signals must be stowed where they are readily accessible and where they can be retrieved quickly if you have to abandon your vessel. Flares should be stored in a watertight container that will float. Flares have a serviceable life. Check your flares to ensure they are not past their expiration date. If they are expired, replace them now.

Contact your local Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiner for questions or for a free no-fault dockside safety examination to ensure your vessel is in full compliance with all applicable regulations and requirements.

www.FishSafe.info

