

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. Cell phones 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 six metres or under where the risk of capsize 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 1 to July 30), 16 people in 2015-16 and 16 in 2016-17.
- Research carried out by MNZ showed 90% of boaties carried at least one way to call for help, and 85% of those had waterproof communications equipment. *Source: Maritime NZ On-the-water Survey, 2017*
- Only 38% of all boaties carried two ways of calling for help every time they went out (compared with 55% in 2016). But the number of those who never carry at least two ways to call for help has declined since 2016 (12% vs 23%). *Source: IPSOS NZ 2017*
- There has been a decrease in the number of people claiming to take a marine radio with them or on their vessel (25% vs 43% in 2016). *Source: IPSOS NZ 2017*
- There has been a significant increase in the number of boaties who take distress beacons on board (42% vs 22% in 2016) but only 58% of these boaties have registered them. *Source: IPSOS NZ 2017*
- A cell phone in a plastic bag was the most commonly carried communication device (53%), followed by marine radio (43%), flares (40%), and a distress beacon (29%). *Source: IPSOS NZ 2017*
- Larger vessel users were significantly more likely to carry at least two forms of communication than smaller vessel users (60% of power boat and sail boat users, compared with 32% of canoeists, 28% of stand-up paddle boarders and 22% of kayakers). *Source: IPSOS NZ 2017*

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.

Boating safety code

- The boating safety code is published by the Safer Boating Forum: Take two waterproof ways to call for help.
- The Forum is a network of government agencies, local body groups, the marine industry, and boating organisations that promote recreational boating safety in New Zealand.

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) make sure you have a marine variety not one intended for the bush or mountains; or EPIRBs (emergency position-indicating radio beacons) which are intended for vessels. Some can be attached to your vessel while others can be hand-held (around the size of a mobile phone) or clipped to your lifejacket.
- Cell phone (call 111) – keep it on you and keep it dry! The problems with a cell phone (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 MNZ's media line on 04 499 7318 or go to <http://maritimenz.govt.nz/recreational/safety/communications/>