

False Distress Calls

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The Coast Guard is seeing an increase in false distress calls. About a third of the false calls are coming from children and other boaters who don't understand how to properly operate their radios.

A distress alert is false if it was transmitted without any indication that a mobile unit or person was in distress and required immediate assistance. Transmitting a false distress alert is prohibited and may be subject to the provisions of Part 1, Subpart A of **47 CFR 80.334**.

The Coast Guard cannot ignore a distress call, even if they think it is 99 percent false. False calls take manpower and equipment that could be answering real calls. They also cost money. A helicopter costs about \$15,000 an hour while a small boat costs about \$4,500.

Making false distress calls is a felony, punishable by a maximum of six years in prison, a \$10,000 civil fine, \$250,000 criminal fine and reimbursing the Coast Guard for the costs of the search and rescue operation.

If you accidentally transmit a unnecessary distress call, immediately reset Digital Selective Call equipment. Then get on Channel 16 and cancel the call.

If for any reason an EPIRB is activated inadvertently, immediately contact the nearest U.S. Coast Guard unit or appropriate rescue coordination center by telephone, radio or ship and cancel the distress alert.

Make sure the EPIRB is registered to avoid a false distress call fiasco like the one received by the Canadian Coast Guard during the 2017 Marblehead-Halifax Ocean Race. Here an unregistered EPIRB accidentally went overboard and self-activated. The owner did not broadcast a cancellation message. The Canadian Coast Guard dispatched multiple assets on this wild goose chase. A member of the Canadian Coast Guard personally expressed their displeasure to me.