



DISTRESS ASSIST RESPONSE TRAINING (DART)

Background:

Auxiliary Telecommunications Operators (TCOs) are trained and certified to handle both distress (MAYDAY) and non-distress radio calls.

TCOs must demonstrate proficiency in handling such calls during their Personal Qualification Standards signoff, prior to certification. Because actual distress calls can be somewhat infrequent, for the individual TCO, practice is needed to keep these important skills sharp.

Purpose:

This Program - Distress Assist Response Training (DART) is focused on providing ongoing training and practice for the handling of distress (and non-distress) calls. Whether these calls are received by watchstanders at Auxiliary Communication Units (ACU) or the comms watch aboard surface or air Operational Facilities while on patrol, a high degree of coordination and resource utilization will be required.

Procedure:

A flotilla with its own ACU can drill in this manner to keep their staff of TCOs responding skill at the highest level. The details can be adapted to fit other schedules and circumstances.

In this example, the ACU is manned by a single TCO watchstander each weekend day, with different watch teams each weekend. The Sunday watch prepares a detailed written DART distress scenario and calls the Saturday watch on the ACUs phone announcing the drill. The calling watch acts as the distressed boater and responds to the information asked by the ACUs duty watch.

When completed, the ACU duty watch simulates reporting the information up to Sector by calling the 'distress' watch to relay the information. This serves as a check on the accuracy of the distress information obtained against the written distress scenario of the distress caller.

A hot wash between the TCOs concludes the DART drill covering everything from accuracy of information recorded to confident voice inflection. The DART drill is repeated the next day with the Saturday watch calling the Sunday duty watch with a new scenario.

A variation of this drill involves two OPFACs on patrol, one serving as the distressed vessel the other the rescue vessel. The distress vessel requests help via cell phone to the ACU who relays the information via cell phone to the rescue vessel to execute a simulated rescue.

As weekend watch teams are mixed each month, a large variety of scenarios are generated for these drills. All TCO watchstander meet quarterly to review the overall distress response quality and further improvements in the drill exercises.

Such drills may be conducted over VHF-FM radio, only with the agreement of the Order Issuing Authority. When drilling using VHF-FM transmissions, all traffic MUST be preceded with the phrase "THIS IS A DRILL", repeated three times.

Although using VHF-FM radios to drill imparts realism and offers practice handling the constraints and timing of simplex communication, using cell phones is often much more convenient. This convenience permits drilling to be conducted more often, thus providing greater benefit.

Each operational unit can adjust the frequency of drills to best fit their needs. Drills can be conducted as often as every watch. It is strongly recommended that DART drills be conducted at least quarterly.

Training feedback is essential with honest and clear critiques of each drill. A quarterly overall program review is also essential to ensure goals are met. The overall objective is calm, professional, confident and accurate response to actual distress calls.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to the Oceanside California Flotilla 114-01-06 for sharing this "Best Practice" example.

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January 14, 2011