

Section 3. Distress and Urgency Procedures

6-3-1. Distress and Urgency Communications

a. A pilot who encounters a *distress* or *urgency* condition can obtain assistance simply by contacting the air traffic facility or other agency in whose area of responsibility the aircraft is operating, stating the nature of the difficulty, pilot's intentions and assistance desired. *Distress* and *urgency* communications procedures are prescribed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), however, and have decided advantages over the informal procedure described above.

b. *Distress* and *urgency* communications procedures discussed in the following paragraphs relate to the use of air ground voice communications.

c. The initial communication, and if considered necessary, any subsequent transmissions by an aircraft in *distress* should begin with the signal MAYDAY, preferably repeated three times. The signal PAN-PAN should be used in the same manner for an *urgency* condition.

d. *Distress* communications have absolute priority over all other communications, and the word MAYDAY commands radio silence on the frequency in use. *Urgency* communications have priority over all other communications except *distress*, and the word PAN-PAN warns other stations not to interfere with *urgency* transmissions.

e. Normally, the station addressed will be the air traffic facility or other agency providing air traffic services, on the frequency in use at the time. If the pilot is not communicating and receiving services, the station to be called will normally be the air traffic facility or other agency in whose area of responsibility the aircraft is operating, on the appropriate assigned frequency. If the station addressed does not respond, or if time or the situation dictates, the *distress* or *urgency* message may be broadcast, or a collect call may be used, addressing "Any Station (Tower)(Radio)(Radar)."

f. The station addressed should immediately acknowledge a *distress* or *urgency* message, provide assistance, coordinate and direct the activities of assisting facilities, and alert the appropriate search

and rescue coordinator if warranted. Responsibility will be transferred to another station only if better handling will result.

g. All other stations, aircraft and ground, will continue to listen until it is evident that assistance is being provided. If any station becomes aware that the station being called either has not received a *distress* or *urgency* message, or cannot communicate with the aircraft in difficulty, it will attempt to contact the aircraft and provide assistance.

h. Although the frequency in use or other frequencies assigned by ATC are preferable, the following emergency frequencies can be used for distress or urgency communications, if necessary or desirable:

121.5 MHz and 243.0 MHz. Both have a range generally limited to line of sight. 121.5 MHz is guarded by direction finding stations and some military and civil aircraft. 243.0 MHz is guarded by military aircraft. Both 121.5 MHz and 243.0 MHz are guarded by military towers, most civil towers, and radar facilities. Normally ARTCC emergency frequency capability does not extend to radar coverage limits. If an ARTCC does not respond when called on 121.5 MHz or 243.0 MHz, call the nearest tower.

6-3-2. Obtaining Emergency Assistance

a. A pilot in any *distress* or *urgency* condition should *immediately* take the following action, not necessarily in the order listed, to obtain assistance:

1. Climb, if possible, for improved communications, and better radar and direction finding detection. However, it must be understood that unauthorized climb or descent under IFR conditions within controlled airspace is prohibited, except as permitted by 14 CFR Section 91.3(b).

2. If equipped with a radar beacon transponder (civil) or IFF/SIF (military):

- (a) Continue squawking assigned Mode A/3 discrete code/VFR code and Mode C altitude encoding when in radio contact with an air traffic facility or other agency providing air traffic services, unless instructed to do otherwise.