

Coast Guard "Cardinal Points" for 2013 Race to Mackinac

The Ninth Coast Guard District wishes you a warm welcome to the 2013 Race to Mackinac. We hope you have a safe and enjoyable voyage. The Race Committee has provided you with excellent materials on how to be best prepared and we'd like to supplement that with some Coast Guard basics.

IN AN EMERGENCY. If an emergency occurs during the race, such as a person overboard, medical problem, taking on water, or disabling damage from storm, and assistance from the Coast Guard is required, we recommend you contact us via VHF-FM channel 16. You do not need to know what the closest Coast Guard station is -- we will determine that -- simply call "Mayday, mayday, mayday, Coast Guard, this is [vessel name] on channel 16, over." During your initial contact, we ask that you provide the following information:

- **Location** (GPS coordinates and/or geographic reference),
- **Nature of distress,**
- **Number of persons on board** and
- **Description of your vessel.**

If you have an EPIRB or PLB (preferred over SPOT devices) on board, activate that as well because the SARTSAT satellite system has global coverage beyond VHF-FM or cellular antenna range. Launching of flares or displaying of other visual signaling devices should also be considered. Use of cellular telephones should be considered a tertiary means of distress alerting.

WHAT TO EXPECT. Once the Coast receives your distress call, we can decide what the closest response units are, what capabilities to bring and approximately how long it will take to get to your location. The Coast Guard communications watch stander on the other end of the radio may have additional questions for you to further ascertain your situation. For those accustomed to police or fire units responding within a few minutes in your city, be aware that Coast Guard boats and helicopters may take longer to reach your location because we may have to transit dozens or even hundreds of miles. Do your best to stabilize your situation in the meantime. The Coast Guard can also provide basic first responder medical care from our boats or helicopters, but paramedic-level (and greater) medical support must be provided from land-based resources. Please be aware that we do not have divers with subsurface or SCUBA capability. Our helicopters carry a rescue swimmer who can conduct rescues on or near the surface only. If subsurface rescue may be required, let us know that as soon as possible because SCUBA capability must come from other agencies and can take hours to coordinate and transport.

RESCUE 21. The Coast Guard recently installed the Rescue 21 communications system around the Great Lakes, greatly increasing our reception and transmission capability. For race participants, your procedure for contacting us remains unchanged - see the "Mayday" call guidance in the "In an emergency" paragraph above. For our part, Rescue 21 allows us to rapidly obtain a line of bearing from our radio towers to the location of the VHF-FM caller. This helps us home in on your position more quickly and easily, and also helps us catch hoax callers. Again, you do not need to know where our towers or stations are - call us on VHF-FM channel 16 and we will work with you on a case-by-case basis.

IN CASE OF STORMS. If severe storms do occur, it is up to race participants to decide whether to continue their courses or to divert toward cover or safe harbors. The Coast Guard cannot make that decision for you, and we are prohibited from providing specific sailing directions (courses to steer, etc.) to you. The Coast Guard communications watch stander can, however, transmit to you published/charted navigational aids, hazards and information that may be helpful in making your decision.

A WORD ABOUT HYPOTHERMIA. Even if air temperatures during the race days are warm and seasonable, be advised that lake temperatures will likely be cold enough in many locations to cause moderate to severe hypothermia within hours. Participants should dress themselves with those water temperatures in mind - and of course, wear their personal flotation device. Hypothermia is an insidious killer that catches unprepared people in the water off guard, so you stack the deck in your favor by wearing a survival suit, dry suit, wet suit or anti-exposure coveralls.

COAST GUARD PATROL COMMANDER. The Coast Guard Cutter ALDER will be serving as patrol commander during the race. In an emergency, however, we recommend you hail us per the "Mayday" procedures above because ALDER may not be within radio range of your position.

NINTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT "SAR ETHOS." The men and women of the Ninth Coast Guard District take our search and rescue (SAR) responsibilities very, very seriously. In fact, our philosophy, or "SAR Ethos" is to treat every potential victim as we would our own family. So know that if you get in trouble out there, we will do our very best. Good luck!

GREAT LAKES SEARCH AND RESCUE LINE - 1-800-321-4400.

Joint Rescue Coordination Center Cleveland
Ninth Coast Guard District
1240 E. 9th Street
Cleveland, OH 44199

1-216-902-6117/6118/6109

ninthdistrictcommandcenter@uscg.mil