

*Excerpts from:*

**U. S. COAST GUARD ADDENDUM TO THE UNITED STATES  
NATIONAL SEARCH AND RESCUE SUPPLEMENT (NSS)  
To The International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue Manual  
(IAMSAR)**

**Section 4.1**

**Maritime SAR Assistance Policy (MSAP)**

**This section sets forth policy and procedures for handling requests for any type of Search and Rescue (SAR) assistance from the Coast Guard and defines Coast Guard relationships with other possible sources of assistance. It establishes internal Coast Guard policy guidance only and is not intended to confer any right or benefit nor create any obligation or duty to the general public.**

**4.1.1 Preamble**

The MSAP is the result of an effort enacted by Congress in 1982. It directed the Commandant to “review Coast Guard policies and procedures for towing and salvage of disabled vessels in order to further minimize the possibility of Coast Guard competition or interference with...commercial enterprise.” **The review was directed because of congressional concern that Coast Guard resources were being used unnecessarily to provide non-emergency assistance to disabled vessels that could be adequately performed by the private sector.**

**4.1.5.3 Guiding Principles in Non-Distress Cases. When specifically requested assistance, such as a commercial firm, marina, or friend, is not available, a request for assistance will be broadcasted. If a commercial provider is available and can be on scene within a reasonable time (usually one hour or less) or an offer to assist is made by a responder listed in the previous paragraph, no further action by the Coast Guard, beyond monitoring the incident, will be taken. Otherwise, a Coast Guard Auxiliary facility, if available, or a Coast Guard resource may be used.**

**NOTE:** “Monitoring” of a non-distress incident need not necessarily constitute a radio communications schedule.

Three principles that guide assistance to vessels not in distress are:

- (a) The first responder on scene with the vessel requesting assistance normally will provide assistance,
- (b) If a Coast Guard resource or Auxiliary facility takes a disabled vessel in tow, the tow will normally terminate at the nearest safe haven, and
- (c) Once undertaken, there is no requirement to break the tow except as described below in paragraph 4.1.6.6, “**Relief of Tow**”.

**4.1.5.4 Non-Distress Use of Coast Guard.** The Coast Guard both supports efforts of private enterprise and encourages volunteerism in assisting mariners. Coast Guard

resources will not unnecessarily interfere with private enterprise. **Coast Guard resources normally do not provide immediate assistance in non-distress cases if alternative assistance is available. A Coast Guard resource may assist in a non-distress situation when no higher priority missions exist and no other capable resource is reasonably available.**

**NOTE:** “Reasonably available” means that the resources should be able to respond before the situation deteriorates.

**4.1.5.5 Acceptable Auxiliary Employment.** When on routine safety patrol under orders, Auxiliary operational facilities may be deployed to minimize response time to requests for assistance. Every effort shall be made to provide maximum SAR coverage in the assigned area of responsibility by using all available resources effectively. Auxiliary facilities may also be available for callout when not on routine patrol. Auxiliary facilities will be used to the extent of their capabilities and availability.

**4.1.5.7 Conflict of Interest for Coast Guard and Auxiliary Personnel.** Because of the possibility of conflict of interest, active duty Coast Guard personnel, Reservists under active duty or inactive duty orders, and Auxiliarists under orders are prohibited from engaging in commercial assistance activity of any sort. Likewise, Reserve and Auxiliary personnel are not to be used in any capacity that might give rise to the perception of a conflict of interest. Vessels and aircraft used for commercial assistance activities shall not be accepted as an Auxiliary facility, and a designated Auxiliary operational facility shall not be used as part of **commercial** assistance activities at any time.

**NOTE:** An Auxiliary facility remains so designated even when not under orders as long as the person(s) is/are a member of the Auxiliary.

**4.1.5.8 Assistance to Auxiliary Facilities.** Coast Guard resources or Auxiliary facilities may be used to help Auxiliary facilities in need of assistance at any time.

**4.1.6.3 Non-Distress. For cases determined NOT to be in the DISTRESS emergency phase [by the Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator (SMC)]:**

(a) Advise and Seek Desires. The requester should be advised that:

- (1) It appears there is no imminent danger;**
- (2) It is Coast Guard policy to defer to an alternate responder; and**
- (3) The Coast Guard will assist in contacting any specifically requested alternate assistance, such as a commercial provider or friend.**

**NOTE:** The issue of what constitutes a “specific request for alternate assistance” has led to confusion. Clearly, if a requester names a specific individual, company, or network, that is a specific request. In the case of generic requests for a specific network organization, contact general dispatch at the parent organization. However, if the mariner is unable to clearly articulate the name of the desired source of assistance, the SMC should ask for clarification. **If unable to get clarification, a MARB should be issued.**

**(b) Offer a Marine Assistance Request Broadcast (MARB). When specific alternate assistance is not requested or available, the mariner will be informed that**

a broadcast can be made to determine if someone in the area can come to his or her assistance.

(1) If the mariner requesting assistance states that a MARB is not desired or specifically requests that a Coast Guard resource or an Auxiliary facility be dispatched, again outline the policy and notify the mariner that unless a specific request is made for alternate assistance, the mariner must either accept the alternative of letting the Coast Guard make a MARB or arrange for his own assistance.

(2) If a MARB is declined, the SMC may monitor the condition of the mariner, but need take no further action unless requested or the situation deteriorates.

**NOTE: If a MARB is declined in a non-distress situation, the Coast Guard has no further obligation to monitor or respond unless the boater changes his/her mind or the situation deteriorates. The burden lies solely with the boater.**

(3) When a MARB is requested, [the SMC will] proceed as described below.

(c) Make a MARB. A MARB will be made to solicit the voluntary response of anyone who can assist the mariner, and the MARB will include a general location of the vessel. (See sample MARB at the end of this document). The MARB must be worded carefully in order not to create an obligation by the vessel operator to accept or pay for the services of any and all responders. **It is used to invite persons, such as commercial providers or Good Samaritans, interested in responding to do so if they desire. If no intent to respond to the MARB is heard within a reasonable period of time, Coast Guard resources or Auxiliary vessels may be directed to respond. A guideline of 10 minutes is recommended for the SMC to await an answer to a MARB before the SMC directs Coast Guard or Auxiliary resources to respond.** Once the MARB is answered, the SMC will determine what a reasonable period of time is for a response time on scene, based on his or her experience with responders in the area and the circumstances of the case. Coast Guard resources or Auxiliary vessels may also be directed to respond if no alternate responder can do so within a reasonable period of elapsed time. Factors governing the elapse of a reasonable period of time for assistance to arrive on scene are discussed below, but such a period should not normally exceed one hour from first awareness of the case.

(d) Monitor Response. As part of the MARB, any resource that is responding should be requested to notify the Coast Guard of the estimated time of arrival (ETA) on scene. This notifies the Coast Guard of the actions of a responder. It also notifies the vessel requesting assistance of the ETA of the assisting resource. Moreover, it notifies other potential responders of the need for further assistance or whether they should proceed with any expectation that they will arrive on scene first. The SMC may repeat the identity and ETA of potential responders so that the mariner requesting assistance and others will know who has responded.

**NOTE:** Although it is encouraged that the MARB include Coast Guard notification of ETAs, it is not mandated. Neither is it mandated that the SMC repeat the identity and ETA of responders. It is, however, advised.

(e) Maintain Communications. A communications schedule between the Coast Guard and the requestor should be established until direct communication is achieved

between the requester and responder to ensure that the situation does not deteriorate and that assistance has arrived.

(f) Reasonable Time Determination. Following the initial MARB, the SMC may wait a reasonable period of time before taking further action, during which additional MARBs may be made if desired by the SMC. The "reasonable period of time" decision must be made by the SMC based upon the information collected at the outset of the communication with the mariner requesting assistance, as updated by subsequent communications checks. Loss of or lack of effective direct communications may increase the level of apprehension. The definition of the ALERT emergency phase is again referred to, with its key word "apprehension." It should be considered that the situation may be causing apprehension in the mind of the mariner, especially if they have so indicated, and any action to alleviate that stress may be instrumental in preventing the situation from deteriorating. The greater the level of apprehension, the shorter the "reasonable period of time."

**(g) Simultaneous Arrival. To minimize conflict, if an Auxiliary facility under orders or a Coast Guard resource arrives on scene nearly simultaneously with a commercial provider, they shall report to the SMC, remain on scene until it is confirmed the provider is capable of providing the required assistance and safely completing the case, then clear the area, and take no further part in the incident.**

(h) Mariner May Decline Offered Assistance. To a limited extent, the mariner requesting assistance has the option to refuse offered assistance. If the requester refuses offers of assistance from a Good Samaritan or an Auxiliarist, another MARB may be issued or the SMC may decide to intervene and dispatch a different Auxiliary facility or a Coast Guard resource. The mariner may also elect to contact a commercial provider on a commercial channel.

**(i) Commercial Assistance Declined. A more difficult situation may arise if the mariner requesting assistance rejects the first arriving commercial assistance. Coast Guard Auxiliary or Coast Guard units should not assist in these cases so long as the situation remains classified below the DISTRESS phase [as non-distress]. Nevertheless, the mariner may be assisted in finding alternatives. Upon notification that the mariner does not desire the assistance offered by the commercial provider, the Coast Guard may, upon the mariner's request, broadcast one additional MARB. The Coast Guard may also provide the telephone numbers of other commercial providers in the area so that the mariner can call them through the Marine Operator. If this is successful, it is the responsibility of the mariner, not the Coast Guard, to negotiate who provides the service. If unsuccessful, and so long as the original commercial provider is on scene, the SMC may maintain a listening watch for the vessel, but must make it clear that neither Coast Guard nor Auxiliary units will be dispatched. Should the commercial provider abandon the case, the SMC may dispatch a Coast Guard or Auxiliary unit or issue an additional MARB, as appropriate. The principle that governs further action by the SMC is that, once a responder has arrived on scene, the level of apprehension regarding the case is probably significantly reduced. Further dealings between the requester and the responder are not Coast Guard responsibility. Additional services provided to the mariner requesting assistance would be provided only on a not-to-interfere basis so long as the level of apprehension remains low.**

**(j) If Situation Deteriorates. The SMC should normally dispatch Coast Guard resources at any time the circumstances in a case threaten to deteriorate into a DISTRESS situation that exceeds the capability of the assisting resource.**

**4.1.6.4 Cases Discovered By Auxiliary Facility [a “Come-Upon”].** When an Auxiliary vessel on routine safety patrol or otherwise on orders **discovers a vessel requesting assistance, but not in radio contact with the Coast Guard**, the Auxiliarist will relay the request for assistance to the Coast Guard operational commander and may undertake to provide assistance, if capable. If a tow is undertaken, the Auxiliary vessel is required to notify the operational commander of the identity of the vessel, the location of the vessel, and the destination to which the vessel is being towed. **No Auxiliary vessel may undertake the tow of another vessel unless the Auxiliarist is reasonably assured of the safety of both vessels and the persons onboard.** If the Auxiliary vessel cannot safely tow a disabled vessel that is standing into danger, it may endeavor to remove the persons from the threatened vessel and stand by until a more capable resource arrives on scene.

**NOTE:** Cases discovered by the Auxiliary are a particularly sensitive section of the policy. How the situation is dealt with is the end product of sustained negotiations and compromise effort on the part of all concerned parties. **It intends that the Auxiliarist, not the SMC, will make the judgment as to whether the Auxiliarist can safely assist. When the Auxiliarist notifies SMC that they intend to assist the vessel, it’s not “asking for permission”. The Auxiliarist has already determined that he/she can safely provide assistance, and the notification to SMC is a courtesy. This policy does not reduce the operational commander's authority and responsibility to exercise command and control over all assigned forces, including Auxiliary vessels on ordered patrols. The operational commander may override the Auxiliarist’s decision if warranted by an evaluation of the circumstances. However, unless there is a specific reason to do so, such as an indication of unusual risk or hazard, or an operational need to assign the Auxiliary vessel to a higher priority mission, the decision to assist should be left to the Auxiliarist.**

**4.1.6.5 Safe Haven Considerations. In cases involving towing by the Coast Guard or Coast Guard Auxiliary, the vessel being assisted will normally be taken to the nearest safe haven.** Coast Guard or Auxiliary resources should not tow the vessel beyond the nearest safe haven when there are commercial resources that could perform this function. Exceptions to this policy may be made in specific cases if, in the judgment of the SMC, they are warranted by humanitarian or other concerns. When determining the suitability of a potential safe haven, the SMC should be sensitive to the reluctance of some private firms and yacht clubs to accept a disabled or damaged vessel and the attendant potential liability.

**Note: (4.1.2.4 Safe Haven): A Safe Haven is considered a place that can accommodate and will accept the safe mooring of the vessel, and has available a means of communication, normally a telephone.**

**4.1.6.6 Relief of Tow.** In cases involving towing by the Coast Guard or Coast Guard Auxiliary where no emergency exists, the assisted vessel may be released to another provider who appears capable provided that:

(a) The SMC and coxswain of the assisting vessel determine that a hand-off can be carried out safely; and either

(b) Alternative assistance is desired and arranged by the operator of the vessel being assisted; or

(c) The operational commander has a higher need for the Coast Guard resource or Auxiliary facility.

**4.1.6.7 Alternative to MARB. When no response to a MARB is evident, such as late at night or during an off-peak period, the SMC may dispatch Coast Guard resources or Auxiliary vessels.** As an alternative, the SMC may pursue by telephone or other communication means any other SAR resource that can provide expeditious response and ask if the resource desires to respond. Again, unless the responder is an Auxiliary facility that will be under orders, the offer should be made in terms of an invitation to provide assistance rather than in terms of "request you proceed and assist." An estimated time of arrival should be obtained and passed to the mariner requesting assistance. Continue to monitor the situation. Direct contact with the vessel requesting assistance as soon as possible should be encouraged.

**Example of a Marine Assistance Request Broadcast (MARB):**

Channel 22A (157.1MHz)

HELLO ALL STATIONS. HELLO ALL STATIONS. HELLO ALL STATIONS.

THIS IS U.S. COAST GUARD SECTOR LOS ANGELES-LONG BEACH RELAYING A MARINE ASSISTANCE REQUEST BROADCAST FOR A 25 FOOT SEARAY PLEASURE CRAFT, MOONSHINE. PLEASURE CRAFT MOONSHINE CANNOT GET ITS ENGINE STARTED AND IS IN THE VICININTY OF LATITUDE 34-33N LONGITUDE 119-14W. ANY VESSEL DESIRING TO ASSIST THE MOONSHINE IS INVITED TO PROCEED TO THAT LOCATION OR CONTACT THEM BY RADIO. PLEASURE CRAFT MOONSHINE IS STANDING BY CHANNEL [an appropriate intership frequency]. IF YOU ARE OFFERING TO ASSIST THE MOONSHINE, PLEASE RESPOND AND PROVIDE AN ESTIMATED TIME OF ARRIVAL.

OUT.