Marine Distress Calls Using a Cell phone

All pleasure craft owners and operators should be aware of the limitations of using a cell phone to report a marine emergency. For a vessel in difficulty, a distress call on VHF Ch16 is always the best method of alerting Coast Guard Radio and nearby vessels. A cell phone call can only be heard by the party receiving the call. A mayday call on VHF Ch 16 can be heard by all stations within radio range. If no other option is available except a cell phone the call should be *16 which is a direct call to Coast Guard Radio.

A distress call on VHF:

- Is quick
- Can reach a large number of potential vessels that can offer assistance
- There is easy communication and coordination between Coast Guard Radio, assisting vessels and the distressed vessel
- VHF coverage is far superior to cell phone coverage in remote areas of the coast

A distress call on a cell phone:

- Is slower
- Is station to station, there is no broad audience
- There is limited coverage for remote areas
- There is no communication with assisting vessels unless they also have a cell phone and numbers are known
- A call placed to a shore party will only cause delays and confusion as the shore party attempts to relay the message to Coast Guard Radio

Recreational boaters should also be aware that vessels equipped with a VHF radio no longer need a station license if the vessel operates in home waters. However, all those who use a VHF radio are required to have a Restricted Operators Certificate.