



FloatPlanWizard Solo Boating Safety Series

Solo Boater Communications & Distress Equipment Guide

VHF, Cellphones, DSC, PLBs, EPIRBs & Checklist

Build useful communication redundancy and keep critical distress equipment accessible after separation from the boat.

Why this checklist matters

A solo boater should not depend on one communication method. Coverage, batteries, devices, antennas, and the operator's ability to reach the equipment can all fail.

The best radio or beacon aboard is of limited use if the solo operator cannot reach it after becoming separated from the vessel. At least one useful emergency communication method should remain personally accessible where appropriate.

Communication equipment improves options, but it does not guarantee coverage, reception, rescue, or a particular beacon-response time. Learn how the equipment works before departure and tell the shore contact which methods you expect to use.

What to think about

Use more than one appropriate method

A cellphone can be useful in coverage and should be charged and protected from water where appropriate. It is not a complete substitute for marine VHF in situations where VHF is the appropriate boating communication tool.

A fixed VHF can provide range and power from the vessel. A charged waterproof handheld VHF can provide backup and may remain useful if the primary radio or boat power fails.

Understand VHF, Channel 16, and DSC

Channel 16 is the international distress, safety, and calling channel. Know how to select it, transmit clearly, state the nature of the problem, and provide location and vessel information where applicable.

Digital Selective Calling can transmit a digital distress alert from a properly configured radio. Its usefulness depends on correct installation, GPS integration where required, and a registered MMSI matched to current vessel and contact information.

PLB and EPIRB are different tools

A PLB is a personally carried emergency beacon. Personal accessibility can be especially valuable to a solo boater who becomes separated from the vessel.

An EPIRB is a maritime or vessel distress beacon designed for boating use. Equipment choice and carriage depend on the vessel and trip. Registration information for either beacon must be kept current.

Accessibility is part of the system

Do not store every radio, phone, or beacon where it becomes unreachable after a capsize or fall overboard. Protect equipment from water, check batteries, and practice basic operation before the trip.

Key things to remember

- Choose a primary method and an appropriate backup.
- Know how to use Channel 16 and configure DSC/MMSI correctly where applicable.
- Register PLBs and EPIRBs and keep the registration current.
- Keep critical personal distress equipment accessible after separation from the vessel.

Communications checklist

Use this checklist before departure. Marking an item does not replace the operator's responsibility to confirm what is appropriate and required for the actual vessel, activity, location, and conditions.

- ☐ My primary communication method works.
- ☐ A backup communication method is available where appropriate.
- ☐ My cellphone is charged if carried.
- ☐ My cellphone is protected from water where appropriate.
- ☐ My VHF works where carried.
- ☐ I know how to use VHF Channel 16 where applicable.
- ☐ DSC/MMSI information is correctly configured where applicable.
- ☐ My handheld VHF is charged where carried.
- ☐ My PLB is registered and current where carried.
- ☐ My EPIRB is registered and current where carried.
- ☐ Critical personal distress equipment is accessible if I become separated from the vessel.
- ☐ My shore contact knows which communication methods I expect to use.

Related guidance

- [Solo Boating Safety Guide](#)
- [U.S. Coast Guard Radio Information for Boaters](#)
- [NOAA Beacon Registration](#)

Turn the checklist into a real trip plan

A checklist helps you remember the details. FloatPlanWizard helps you organize them into a float plan that can be created, sent to a shore contact, shared, and automatically monitored during an active trip.

For solo boaters, FloatPlanWizard puts the information a shore contact may need into one organized workflow: vessel and operator details, passengers when applicable, route, departure, destination, timing, shore contact, trip sharing, and supported scheduled check-in information.

FloatPlanWizard is built specifically to make float-plan preparation, sharing, and automated trip monitoring practical for recreational boaters - including people who boat alone.

Automated monitoring is not professional human monitoring. FloatPlanWizard does not guarantee live tracking, a current location, alert delivery, distress verification, emergency-services contact, or rescue dispatch.

[FloatPlanWizard.com](https://floatplanwizard.com)
[Read the complete Solo Boating Safety Guide](#)

Safety note: This guide provides general recreational-boating safety information and does not replace applicable laws, official safety guidance, training, seamanship, or the judgment of the vessel operator. Requirements vary by vessel, activity, location, and jurisdiction.

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