



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Safety Alert 05-97

SUCCESSFUL RESCUES IN NEW ENGLAND

Use of EPIRBs and other survival equipment saves lives on fishing vessels. (Text taken from a letter issued January 22, 1997 from the office of Rear Admiral J. L. Linnon, Commander, First Coast Guard District.) [Courtesy of the First U.S. Coast Guard District Office, Boston, MA](#)

Disaster at sea among New England's fishing fleet was averted on three occasions last week due to the presence on board each vessel of simple yet vital distress warning and lifesaving equipment. The fishing vessels COMMODORE and TRINITY, hundreds of miles apart and many miles offshore, began sinking within hours of one another in the midst of a severe winter storm. Later the same day the fishing vessel LADY MARIA's pilothouse was destroyed in heavy seas. In each case the Coast Guard received initial notification of distress by an electronic signal emitted from the vessel's 406 MHz Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon ([406 EPIRB](#)). The 406 EPIRB is much more capable than earlier class A or B EPIRBs (121.5 or 243 Mhz). Its signal provides us accurate position information and, if properly registered, will also provide information on the vessel's owner/operator, homeport, home and business phones, etc. Through the 406 EPIRB signal we were able to immediately ascertain that there was in fact a distress at sea and promptly dispatched rescue units to the appropriate locations. Equally important was that each vessel had ample cold water survival suits available for the crew, and inflatable liferafts (crews from the COMMODORE and TRINITY abandoned ship). All crewmen--six in COMMODORE, five onboard TRINITY, and four in LADY MAMA--were promptly rescued and returned safely to their loved ones.

I should also caution mariners to guard against inadvertent activation of EPIRBs - false alarms that needlessly divert Coast Guard rescue units from real distress cases --by ensuring EPIRBs are securely mounted and properly maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

I urge all who venture to sea, particularly in New England waters, to heed the lessons of COMMODORE, TRINITY, and LADY MARIA. Registered 406 EPIRBs, survival suits, inflatable liferafts, and other lifesaving gear should be onboard, and crews should know where this gear is located and how to use it. These vital pieces of equipment can easily be the difference between a successful rescue and disaster.

Signed by J.L LINNON
Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard
Commander, First Coast Guard District

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