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BOATING SAFETY IMPROVES, NEW VHF MARINE DISTRESS SYSTEM IN PLACE

WHITEHORSE – Boaters, in an emergency or in distress, will now be able to radio for assistance from the Southern Lakes by using the VHF Marine Distress System, a new communications system that is expected to dramatically improve emergency response time.

“We’ve been working to develop a VHF Marine Distress System for the Yukon since 1992,” said Jeff Stanhope, technical advisor for the system. “It has been a challenging project, with many hurdles, trials and set-backs over the last 10 years, but I’m happy to say that this summer the system is finally up and running.”

The Yukon Amateur Radio Association has led the project and received support from Industry Canada, the Government of Yukon, the Emergency Measures Organization, Yukon Electrical Company Ltd, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Yukon Power Squadron Society, and Yukon Energy. The RCMP and Daniels Electronics of Victoria also donated some radio equipment to the project.

Distressed boaters can access the system with their marine radio and contact “Whitehorse Radio”, Action Answering Limited, from late May through to early October, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Upon receiving a call for assistance, Action Answering will advise the RCMP of the situation. International standard (VHF) marine radios operate on the system and may be purchased at local retail outlets.

The system operates from a series of mountain-top repeaters that are installed on strategic locations near some of the most popular boating areas in Southern Yukon. The radio service covers most lakes and waterways from Destruction Bay to Teslin.

“Of course, preventing accidents is still the boater’s responsibility,” said Shelley Huebert, manager of Yukon’s Emergency Measures Organization. “It is very important for boaters to respect rough water and weather conditions, to be prepared and know their equipment’s capabilities. However, if someone finds themselves in trouble, this radio system will improve the ability for boaters to call for assistance and emergency personnel to respond to the situation and save lives.”

A Yukon Marine Distress System description is attached to the news release at www.gov.yk.ca; for more information on the VHF Marine Distress System, visit www.ypps.ca or www.yara.ca.

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YUKON VHF MARINE DISTRESS SYSTEM – SYSTEM DESCRIPTION:

What is the Yukon Marine Distress System?

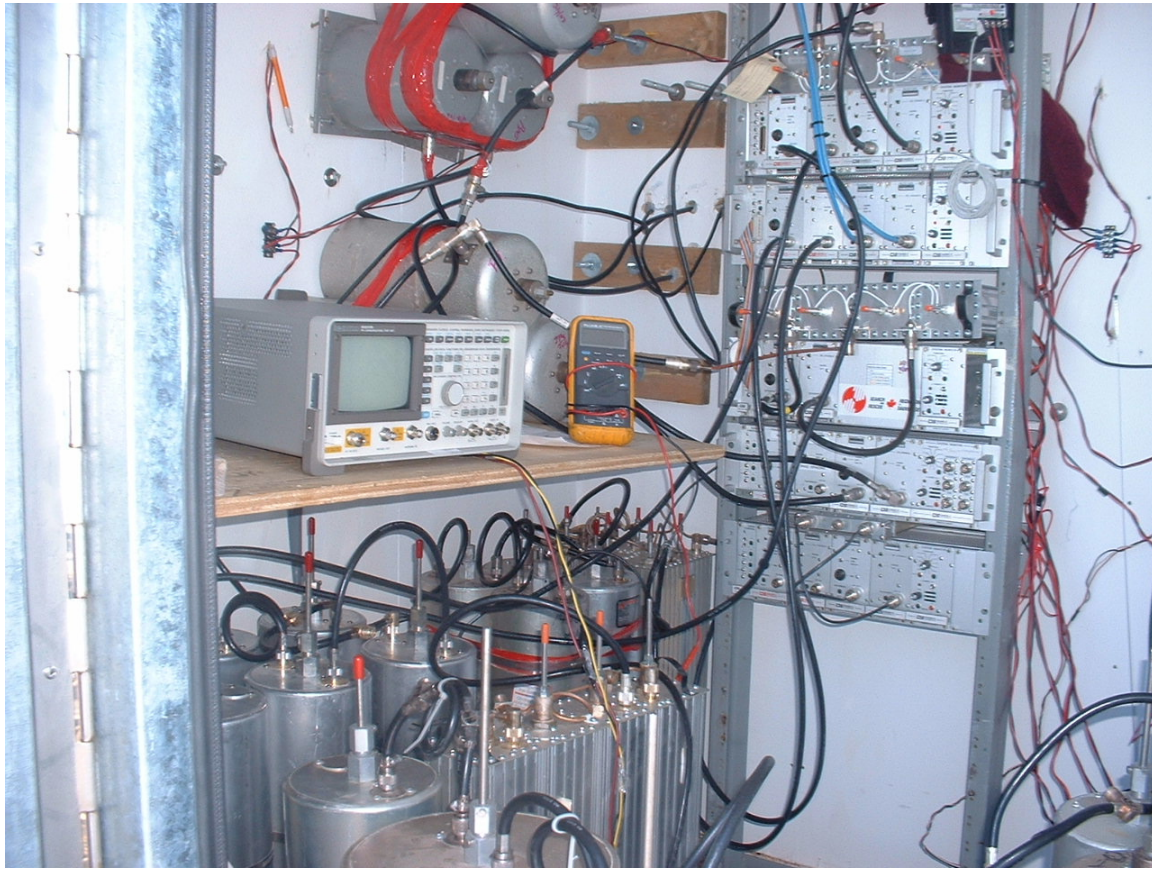
For several decades now, there has been a need to provide some basic marine communications for the growing number of boaters on the Yukon lakes and rivers. While this type of service has been in place for decades in many of Canada's southern areas, some of them inland, there has never been anything in the Yukon. Although the Canadian Coast Guard is very supportive, they do not officially have a mandate to provide this service for the Yukon waterways.

This Yukon Marine Distress System was first conceived in 1992 by a consortium of community volunteers and other agencies. The main partners are the Yukon Electrical Company Ltd, the Emergency Measures Organization (EMO, Yukon government), Industry Canada, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the Yukon Amateur Radio Association (YARA), Action Answering Ltd, and the Canadian Power Squadron Society.

Serious work began on this project in 1994. For access points, the logical choice was to work with YARA to access some of their mountain-top radio sites (also known as "Comshels") which were strategically located far above various lakes and waterways. Ever since, YARA has been one of the main contributors having already been involved in a number of community events and programs over the years involving "public good" type communications. YARA has also worked closely with EMO in emergency planning exercises or actual emergency events such as the large forest fires last summer.

One of the big advantages of any marine system is that the consumer grade radios, used in this service, are affordable and available in many local stores. This means that the service can be utilized by all types of boaters, which also includes people in canoes and kayaks.

Through various fund raising activities over the past 13 years, more than \$90K worth of commercial marine equipment has been installed at four mountain top sites and one downtown site. Although this system has been technically operating for about one year, it could not be publicly announced until secure funding was achieved. Funding has now been secured for the system's operating and maintenance costs.



The Mt. Decoeli site, for Marine Channel 23, is at 7,800 feet west of Haines Junction. This is the only non-Comshel type of building used in the system. Two other Comshels located here, the last one reinforced with steel ribbing, however both were lost in the previous five years due to winds which can reach over 200/KMH. Estimated winds at this site reach over 200 KPH but there is little icing.

The main radio sites are as follows:

- 7,200' Montana Mountain (Channel 16) near Carcross;
- 6,000' Hayes Peak (Channel 09) near Teslin;
- 6,600' Pilot Mountain (Channel 20) near Whitehorse; and,
- 7,800' Mount Decoeli, (Channel 23) near Haines Junction (above).

The Yukon system is unique in that the Canadian Coast Guard does not monitor the radio traffic as they do along Canada's coast lines or on the Great Lakes. The Yukon system is 'self-managed' whereby users are responsible to use their radios according to the marine radio operator's guide.

Hailing frequencies are selected channels which are reserved for calling for assistance only. Apart from other boaters who could be in the area, these channels are monitored by Action Answering, a volunteer dispatch service in downtown Whitehorse, will provide full 24/7 monitoring service.

Together, these sites span more than 500 kilometers east to west, and 250 kilometers north to south. Because of this large coverage area, the system is able to provide a direct link for distressed boaters from many lakes and then to the RCMP and/or the search and rescue (SAR) personnel. Once SAR officials are deployed, the system can be accessed directly from SAR radios to converse with the distressed boater and other responders.

YUKON MARINE DISTRESS SYSTEM - Marine VHF Radio Guide

ALL AREAS - CHANNEL 16

Distress & Calling ONLY - Move to another channel after contact

LAKES WITH MARINE RADIO REMOTES - For Distress Only

- TESLIN LAKE - JOHNSON'S CROSSING (most areas) **CHANNEL 09** Distress Only
LAKE LEBARGE, YUKON RIVER (Whitehorse area) **CHANNEL 20** Distress Only
KLUANE LAKE AREA, DEZADEASH LAKE (most areas) .. **CHANNEL 23** Distress Only
SOUTHERN LAKES, MARSH LAKE (most areas) **CHANNEL 16** Distress Only

**WHITEHORSE RADIO (ACTION ANSWERING) WILL MONITOR THIS SYSTEM
AND CAN RELAY A DISTRESS MESSAGE TO THE RCMP**

After establishing contact with other stations on Channel 16, **users MUST move to a working channel** such as Channel 06,68,69, etc. to avoid tying-up the entire Yukon network and causing interference to other boaters, and to the US Coast Guard.

This guide shows only approximate radio signal coverage. Your coverage will vary depending on local terrain and the type of radio equipment used (for instance, a portable vs. a 25 watt mobile).

This solar and wind powered radio system is subject to unplanned outages due to unforeseen equipment failures.

For more information and coverage maps go to www.ypsc.ca OR www.yara.ca



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Boat Sticker and Pocket Guide



Meeting in Juneau with US Coast Guard Staff in June 2004 for frequency coordination. Left to Right: Warren J. Russell, LCDR, Chief; Communications, Technology and Security Branch; Master Chief Jones, (Warren’s boss); Jim Rackley, Communications Technologist; Jeff Stanhope (IC)

Yearly Estimated Budget:

It is estimated that each year, the operations and maintenance budget will be \$17K.

Revenue

These agencies provide the O&M funding

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Yukon Electric Co. Ltd..... | \$5K |
| Fisheries and Oceans (DFO – Coast Guard) | \$5K |
| YTG – EMO | \$5K |
| Yukon Energy (*In kind - helicopter time) | \$2K |
| Total Revenue | \$17K |

Estimated Expenses by category

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| Liability Insurance | \$2.5K |
| Training | \$1K |
| Advertising | \$2.5K |
| Parts/repairs | \$3K |
| Helicopter Time | \$7K* |
| Misc..... | \$1K |
| Total Expense | \$17K |

A few words of thanks to our community partners....

The Yukon Emergency Measures Organization (EMO):

EMO was an active participant in the system development and paid for the printing of the stickers and the pocket guides. EMO's on-going role with Search and Rescue societies provides an opportunity for effective use of the radio system through their regular training program.

The Yukon Power Squadron:

The Yukon Power Squadron Society (YPSS) has been very helpful and a key partner in system planning and education. The YPSS has now integrated this system into their training courses for boaters and also has it listed on their web site, www.ypss.ca.

Action Answering Ltd:

A well respected answering service, Action Answering Ltd, has volunteered their services from when this concept was brought-up more than ten years ago. They have their staff trained by volunteers from the YPSS to help them undertake their role as marine dispatchers whereby they are contributing an enhanced level of service.

The Yukon Forest Service:

The Yukon Marine Distress System would also like to acknowledge the continuing contribution of Yukon Forestry for shared helicopter time. This was used in the summer of 2004 to service Hayes Peak and Montana Mountain.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO):

Starting in April 2001, the National Search and Rescue Secretariat has provided, through DFO, about \$83K towards the capital costs required for the initial construction of the system. In addition, DFO Pacific Region, from time to time sends what surplus electronic equipment it can spare for the system operations and maintenance.

Yukon Electrical Company Ltd (YECL):

YECL has agreed to fund this system up to \$5,000 each year. In the past, YECL has also helped with site rebuilds that have been destroyed by direct lightning or when Comshels have been blown off the mountain entirely. Since 1996, only three Comshels have been lost so far.

Yukon Energy Corporation (YEC):

YEC has agreed to pay (in-kind) for a helicopter flight to the Pilot Mountain site once each year. This amounts to about \$2,000/year.

The Yukon Amateur Radio Association and other Community Volunteers:

Finally, it should also be noted that this system is also supported by many other volunteer groups and individuals such as the Yukon Amateur Radio Association, who designed and built it. In addition there are various volunteer listeners on the lakes, such as the Southern Lakes Marina, who monitor the marine system and are able to help by relaying boaters' messages.