

Rescue on the water a finely tuned operation

SAR responders strike quickly

BY CHRISTOF MARTI, VANCOUVER SUN NOVEMBER 28, 2013



A Jericho Rescue craft on patrol.

Photograph by: Courtesy, Christof Marti

“Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, we have run aground near Panther Point, Wallace Island and are evacuating all crew.”

The smiles onboard the craft used for a summer sailing lesson along Trincomli Channel in the Gulf Islands quickly waned.

We were just over a mile south of the unfortunate power vessel and quickly started our engine to head toward the scene of the accident. By the time we arrived, another powerboat was already assisting with the evacuation and our help was not required.

The Canadian Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue (RCM-SAR, formerly Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary) responded to the call. The RCM-SAR vessel, stationed in nearby Ganges, arrived within 20 minutes, while the Coast Guard hovercraft arrived shortly thereafter.

The members of the RCM-SAR boarded the power boat and quickly established that the hull seemed to be intact and no water was coming in. With all crew ashore and the power boat literally high and

dry, a commercial towing service was called and the search and rescue team left as quickly as they approached.

This is just one of the incidents I witnessed over the season. Running aground on a reef, a broken-down vessel, a kayaker caught in high wind and big seas, and a windsurfer unable to get back to shore are typical situations where the search and rescue teams are called to help.

Who are these teams and how are they co-ordinated?

When a marine emergency occurs, the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Victoria, which is operated by the Canadian Forces and Canadian Coast Guard, tasks one of several rescue operators to assist the vessel in distress (see below for emergency numbers).

In addition to the two organizations mentioned above, there is the Canadian Life Boat Institution and Jericho Rescue on English Bay. With the exception of the Canadian Coast Guard, these SAR operators are all volunteer-run and form a key part of the rescue system on the West Coast.

The RCM-SAR is the largest volunteer rescue operator with more than 1,000 members and 40 stations. They have a fleet of vessels especially designed for the demands of B.C.'s coast. The RCM-SAR handled more than 750 missions this year, up 25 per cent compared to last year, and assisted more than 500 people.

The Jericho Rescue team is a program of the Jericho Sailing Centre Association dedicating to supporting and enhancing safe recreational enjoyment of the ocean through the Jericho Sailing Centre on English Bay. This year Jericho assisted more than 170 people in varying degrees of distress.

The Life Boat Institution operates two all-weather lifeboats out of Steveston. They patrol the waters of the Fraser River and the Strait of Georgia. The Lifeboat Institution also assists during special events and when recreational and commercial fishing are at their peak. Their presence on the water helps preventing accidents in the first place. Recently their lifeboats escorted commercial vessels during the long spell of thick fog and also handled a number of SAR incidents.

The controversial closure of the Kit's Coast Guard Station by Transport Canada earlier this year made big waves across the entire boating community. Despite the outcry of the entire marine industry in B.C., Transport Canada could not be moved to reconsider its decision. The loss of this important rescue station will put an even bigger emphasis on the volunteer operations.

As mariners we are grateful for the presence and effort of all SAR operators, their volunteers and all the donors who make these operations possible. Without them, our waters would be much less safe.

• *Background and statistics were provided by the following organizations: RCM- SAR, Jericho Rescue, Canadian Life Boat Institution.*

Emergency Numbers (24/7): Telephone: 1-800-567-5111, cell #727 satellite, local; or out of area,

250-413-8933.

Christof Marti is the owner of Simply Sailing School in Vancouver (simplysailing.ca) and is a director on the Board of BC Sailing. Trained as an engineer and with an MBA in finance, Christof is also a qualified sailing instructor and a certified Yachtmaster. He will be filing reports from B.C.'s coastal waters over the season.

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