

# Cell phone

Your cell phone can be used to call 911 for emergency assistance. It lets you speak directly to a rescue dispatcher, give them your position, and receive instructions.

However, cell phones also can be one of the least reliable forms of communications on the water. Batteries die, signals get lost, and they're vulnerable to water damage and may not work when needed. In a life-or-death situation, you want to be certain your call will go through.



Traveling by water presents greater safety challenges than traveling on land: Weather, waves, tides and currents, water levels, large boat traffic and other concerns all pose risks. Safe boating begins with being aware of these factors before going out on the water. Remember to swim and boat only when sober, wear a life jacket, follow the "rules of the road," and, most importantly, have fun!

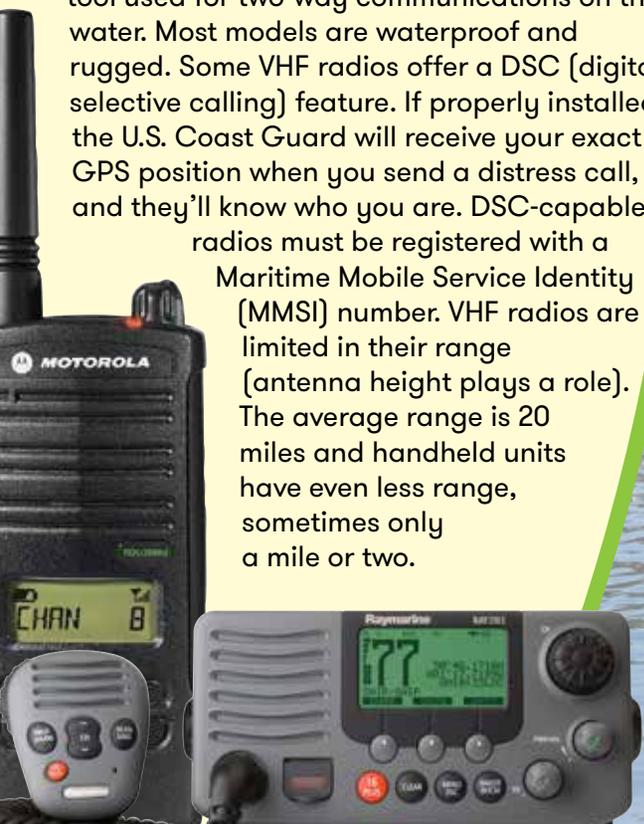
For more information, visit

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# VHF radio

A very high frequency (VHF) radio is a common tool used for two-way communications on the water. Most models are waterproof and rugged. Some VHF radios offer a DSC (digital selective calling) feature. If properly installed, the U.S. Coast Guard will receive your exact GPS position when you send a distress call, and they'll know who you are. DSC-capable

radios must be registered with a Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number. VHF radios are limited in their range (antenna height plays a role). The average range is 20 miles and handheld units have even less range, sometimes only a mile or two.



Legislation created the Boating Program in 1983 and made Washington State Parks responsible for administering the program.

The goal of the program is to reduce accidents and fatalities, increase stewardship of Washington waterways, and keep recreational boating a safe, accessible and enjoyable pastime.

Partners include law enforcement agencies, state agencies, marinas and boating organizations across Washington.



Boating Program

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*All Washington state parks are developed and maintained for the enjoyment of all people.*

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# WASHINGTON STATE PARKS Communications Equipment

## FOR BOATERS AND PADDLERS



Boating Program

[www.parks.state.wa.us/boating](http://www.parks.state.wa.us/boating)

# Emergency communications

Accidents can happen to anybody, at any time, and when it's least expected. Be prepared and rescue ready at all times. Being rescue ready means you have the right equipment at the right time to maximize your chance of survival in an accident.

Communications equipment is an essential part of being rescue ready. The quicker rescuers can find you, the better your chance for survival. The Washington State Parks Boating Program recommends you **carry two forms of communication** in a waterproof bag or container. Keep them on you or in a floating ditch bag, in case you are separated from your vessel.

Different types of equipment work in different areas and vary from simple to complex. Research the options, and choose appropriately for your boating activity.



## Emergency position indicating radio beacon

The emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) interfaces with international search-and-rescue satellites that calculate your position via GPS, triangulation or a combination of the two. What you need to know:

- Most EPIRBs have unlimited range.
- They can be activated manually or automatically.
- They float and are waterproof.
- EPIRBs can be expensive.
- Less expensive units commonly aren't GPS-equipped, which means rescuers can't pinpoint your location.
- Ongoing costs include battery service as they age.
- EPIRBs must be registered to a specific vessel, so they can't be taken from vessel to vessel.
- They are limited to one-way communication and can only send a signal out for help with your location and vessel information.



## Personal locator beacon

A personal locator beacon (PLB) works like an EPIRB. What you need to know:

- PLBs are smaller and less expensive than EPIRBs.
- They can be carried at all times.
- They aren't registered to a specific vessel.
- PLBs have a shorter battery life than an EPIRB.
- They require manual activation.
- Limited to one-way communication; they only send a signal out for help with your location.

## Satellite messenger

These devices use satellite communications to send a short text message to an individual or, in times of need, transmit your exact GPS location to emergency responders. What you need to know:

- Units are small and can be carried on you at all times.
- They are less expensive than a PLB.
- Waterproof.
- Easy to operate.
- Units require a commercial network and charge for airtime, but you can activate network for any length of time as needed.
- Features vary widely depending on the type of unit and service chosen. Some allow for two-way communication, while others only transmit and cannot receive messages.



*Equipment review provided by Lenny Rudow, a 20-year veteran writer specializing in fishing, boating and marine electronics. [www.fishtalkmag.com](http://www.fishtalkmag.com)*