

SERA.14095 Distress and urgency radiotelephony communication procedures

Regulation (EU) 2020/469

(a) General

(1) Distress and urgency traffic shall comprise all radiotelephony messages relative to the distress and urgency conditions respectively. Distress and urgency conditions are defined as:

(i) Distress a condition of being threatened by serious and/or imminent danger and of requiring immediate assistance.

(ii) Urgency a condition concerning the safety of an aircraft or other vehicle, or of some person on board or within sight, but which does not require immediate assistance.

(2) The radiotelephony distress signal 'MAYDAY' and the radiotelephony urgency signal 'PAN PAN' shall be used at the commencement of the first distress and urgency communication respectively. At the commencement of any subsequent communication in distress and urgency traffic, it shall be permissible to use the radiotelephony distress and urgency signals.

(3) The originator of messages addressed to an aircraft in distress or urgency condition shall restrict to the minimum the number and volume and content of such messages as required by the condition.

(4) If no acknowledgement of the distress or urgency message is made by the ATS unit addressed by the aircraft, other ATS units shall render assistance as prescribed in points (b)(2) and (b)(3) respectively.

(5) Distress and urgency traffic shall normally be maintained on the frequency on which such traffic was initiated until it is considered that better assistance can be provided by transferring that traffic to another frequency.

(6) In cases of distress and urgency communications, in general, the transmissions by radiotelephony shall be made slowly and distinctly, each word being clearly pronounced to facilitate transcription.

(b) Radiotelephony distress communications

(1) Action by the aircraft in distress

In addition to being preceded by the radiotelephony distress signal 'MAYDAY' in accordance with point (a)(2), preferably spoken three times, the distress message to be sent by an aircraft in distress shall:

(i) be on the air-ground frequency in use at the time;

(ii) consist of as many as possible of the following elements spoken distinctly and, if possible, in the following order:

(A) the name of the ATS unit addressed (time and circumstances permitting);

(B) the identification of the aircraft;

(C) the nature of the distress condition;

(D) the intention of the pilot-in-command;

(E) present position, level and heading.

(2) Action by the ATS unit addressed or by the first ATS unit acknowledging the distress message

The ATS unit addressed by an aircraft in distress, or the first ATS unit acknowledging the distress message, shall:

(i) immediately acknowledge the distress message;

(ii) take control of the communications or specifically and clearly transfer that responsibility, advising the aircraft if a transfer is made; and

(iii) take immediate action to ensure that all necessary information is made available, as soon as possible, to:

(A) the ATS unit concerned;

(B) the aircraft operator concerned, or its representative, in accordance with pre-established arrangements;

(iv) warn other ATS units, as appropriate, in order to prevent the transfer of traffic to the frequency of the distress communication.

(3) Imposition of silence

(i) The aircraft in distress, or the ATS unit in control of distress traffic, shall be permitted to impose silence, either on all stations of the mobile service in the area or on any station which interferes with the distress traffic. It shall address these instructions 'to all stations' or to one station only, according to the circumstances. In either case, it shall use:

(A) 'STOP TRANSMITTING';

(B) the radiotelephony distress signal 'MAYDAY'.

(ii) The use of the signals specified in point (b)(3)(i) shall be reserved for the aircraft in distress and for the ATS unit controlling the distress traffic.

(4) Action by all other ATS units/aircraft

(i) The distress communications have absolute priority over all other communications and ATS units/aircraft aware of them shall not transmit on the frequency concerned unless:

(A) the distress is cancelled or the distress traffic is terminated;

(B) all distress traffic has been transferred to other frequencies;

(C) the ATS unit controlling communications gives permission;

(D) it has itself to render assistance.

(ii) Any ATS unit/aircraft which has knowledge of distress traffic, and which cannot itself assist the aircraft in distress, shall nevertheless continue listening to such traffic until it is evident that assistance is being provided.

(5) Termination of distress communications and of silence

(i) When an aircraft is no longer in distress, it shall transmit a message cancelling the distress condition.

(ii) When the ATS unit which has controlled the distress communication traffic becomes aware that the distress condition is ended, it shall take immediate action to ensure that this information is made available, as soon as possible, to:

(A) the ATS units concerned;

(B) the aircraft operator concerned, or its representative, in accordance with pre-established arrangements.

(iii) The distress communication and silence conditions shall be terminated by transmitting a message, including the words 'DISTRESS TRAFFIC ENDED', on the frequency or frequencies being used for the distress traffic. This message shall be originated only by the ATS unit controlling the communications when, after the reception of the message prescribed in point (b)(5)(i), it is authorised to do so by the competent authority.

(c) Radiotelephony urgency communications

(1) Action by the aircraft reporting an urgency condition except as indicated in point (c)(4)

In addition to being preceded by the radiotelephony urgency signal 'PAN PAN' in accordance with point (a)(2), preferably spoken three times and each word of the group pronounced as the French word 'panne', the urgency message to be sent by an aircraft reporting an urgency condition shall:

(i) be on the air-ground frequency in use at the time;

(ii) consist of as many as required of the following elements spoken distinctly and, if possible, in the following order:

(A) the name of the ATS unit addressed;

(B) the identification of the aircraft;

(C) the nature of the urgency condition;

(D) the intention of the pilot-in-command;

(E) present position, level and heading;

(F) any other useful information.

(2) Action by the ATS unit addressed or first ATS unit acknowledging the urgency message

The ATS unit addressed by an aircraft reporting an urgency condition or the first ATS unit acknowledging the urgency message shall:

(i) acknowledge the urgency message;

(ii) take immediate action to ensure that all necessary information is made available, as soon as possible, to:

(A) the ATS unit concerned;

(B) the aircraft operator concerned, or its representative, in accordance with pre-established arrangements;

(iii) if necessary, exercise control of communications.

(3) Action by all other ATS units/aircraft

The urgency communications have priority over all other communications except distress communications and all ATS units/aircraft shall take care not to interfere with the transmission of urgency traffic.

(4) Action by an aircraft used for medical transports

(i) The use of the signal described in point (c)(4)(ii) shall indicate that the message which follows concerns a protected medical transport pursuant to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols.

(ii) For the purpose of announcing and identifying aircraft used for medical transports, a transmission of the radiotelephony urgency signal 'PAN PAN', preferably spoken three times, and each word of the group pronounced as the French word 'panne', shall be followed by the radiotelephony signal for medical transports 'MAY-DEE-CAL', pronounced as in the French 'medical'. The use of the signals described above indicates that the message which follows concerns a protected medical transport.

The message shall convey the following data:

(A) the call sign or other recognised means of identification of the medical transports;

(B) position of the medical transports;

(C) number and type of the medical transports;

(D) intended route;

(E) estimated time en-route and of departure and arrival, as appropriate; and

(F) any other information such as flight altitude, radio frequencies guarded, languages used and secondary surveillance radar modes and codes.

(5) Action by the ATS units addressed, or by other stations receiving a medical transports message

The provisions of points (c)(2) and (c)(3) shall apply as appropriate to ATS units receiving a medical transports message.

(d) As laid down in Article 4a the VHF emergency frequency (121,500 MHz) shall be used for genuine emergency purposes including any of the following:

- (1) to provide a clear channel between aircraft in distress or emergency and a ground station when the normal channels are being utilised for other aircraft;
- (2) to provide a VHF communication channel between aircraft and aerodromes, not normally used by international air services, in case of an emergency condition arising;
- (3) to provide a common VHF communication channel between aircraft, either civil or military, and between such aircraft and surface services, involved in common search and rescue operations, prior to changing when necessary to the appropriate frequency;
- (4) to provide air-ground communication with aircraft when airborne equipment failure prevents the use of the regular channels;
- (5) to provide a channel for the operation of emergency locator transmitters, and for communication between survival craft and aircraft engaged in search and rescue operations;
- (6) to provide a common VHF channel for communication between civil aircraft and intercepting aircraft or intercept control units and between civil or intercepting aircraft and air traffic services units in the event of interception of the civil aircraft.

GM1 SERA.14095(b)(1) Distress and urgency radiotelephony communication procedures

ED Decision 2016/023/R

ACTION BY THE AIRCRAFT IN DISTRESS

(a) The provisions may be supplemented by the following measures:

- (1) the distress message of an aircraft in distress being made on the emergency frequency 121,5 MHz or another aeronautical mobile frequency, if considered necessary or desirable. Not all aeronautical stations maintain a continuous guard on the emergency frequency,
- (2) the distress message of an aircraft in distress being broadcast if time and circumstances render this course preferable;
- (3) the aircraft transmitting on the maritime mobile service radiotelephony calling frequencies;
- (4) the aircraft using any means at its disposal to attract attention and make known its conditions (including the activation of the appropriate SSR mode and code);
- (5) any station taking any means at its disposal to assist an aircraft in distress;

(6) any variation on the elements listed, when the transmitting station is not itself in distress, provided that such circumstance is clearly stated in the distress message.

(b) The ATS unit addressed will normally be that ATS unit communicating with the aircraft or in whose area of responsibility the aircraft is operating.