



Distress & Emergency Signals

The Annex IV distress signals, modern GMDSS alerts, and the radio and life-saving signals every watchkeeper must know on sight.

ANX IV Pyrotechnic

- Red rocket/parachute flare or red star
- Red hand flare
- Orange smoke by day

ANX IV Sound & radio

- Gun or explosive signal at ~1 minute intervals
- Continuous sounding of any fog-signal apparatus
- SOS by any means; spoken "MAYDAY"

ANX IV Visual & flags

- Flags **N** over **C** (November-Charlie)
- A square flag with a ball above or below it
- Flames on the vessel (e.g. a burning tar barrel)

ANX IV Body & survival

- Arms outstretched, **raised & lowered** slowly & repeatedly
- A piece of **orange canvas** (with square + circle) for aircraft
- Dye marker spread on the water

GMDSS Modern alerts

- DSC distress alert — VHF Ch 70 / MF 2187.5 kHz
- EPIRB 406 MHz — float-free, satellite-detected
- SART / AIS-SART — marks you on radar / AIS

R/T Radiotelephony

- MAYDAY ×3 — grave & imminent danger
- PAN-PAN ×3 — urgency (safety of vessel/person)
- SECURITE ×3 — safety / navigational warning

DUTY On receiving a distress

- Acknowledge, **keep watch**, fix the casualty's position
- Re-transmit if she can't reach a coast station
- Proceed with all speed to assist (SOLAS V/33)

SAR Life-saving signals

- Orange smoke / white star = "you are seen, help coming"
- Search patterns & aircraft signals: see IAMSAR Vol III
- Shore-to-ship light & flag replies in distress

TRAP Easy marks to lose

- **Never** use or imitate a distress signal except in real distress
- PAN-PAN = urgency, not distress — don't confuse with MAYDAY
- A single red flare alone still means distress

ORAL What the examiner wants

- Reel off **six** distress signals without pausing
- "MAYDAY distress, PAN-PAN urgency, SECURITE safety"
- Know your duty to assist and how to acknowledge a DSC alert

● PROCEDURE ● SURVIVAL ● YOUR DUTY ● DISTRESS / TRAP ● ORAL TIP

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1,200+ Part A questions, MCA-style mock orals with an AI examiner, audio sound signals, and offline study for those at sea. Scan to download.

