

Safety Bulletin

13 NOVEMBER 2015

Inappropriate chatter on emergency VHF frequency 121.5

“Mayday, mayday, mayday” – can anyone hear you?

Following receipt of advice from a senior airline captain that 121.5 was being regularly used as a ‘chat’ frequency by other pilots, Airservices requested confirmation from other industry representatives. A number of airline operations managers confirmed that their pilots had reported an increase in inappropriate communication on 121.5.

This dedicated emergency frequency is to protect the search and rescue satellite receiver from interference for emergency locator transmitter (ELT) and emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) emergency transmissions.

ICAO (*International Standards and Recommended Practices*, Annex 10, Volume 5) states that the emergency channel (121.5 MHz) shall be used only for genuine emergency purposes, such as:

- 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
- to provide a channel for the operation of ELTs and for communication between survival craft and aircraft engaged in search and rescue operations
- 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.

AIP ENR 1.1 states that a pilot should broadcast their intentions on 121.5 in any of the following circumstances:

- total loss of communications
- failure of all primary altimetry systems
- weather deviations
- height deviation due to greater than moderate turbulence
- deviations for reasons other than weather where clearance cannot be obtained.

Pilots are to continue to monitor 121.5 MHz during flight and report receipt of signals from distress beacons (longer than 10 seconds in duration) or other distress calls to air traffic control (ATC). ATC may ask pilots to make calls on their behalf to aircraft that are out of normal communications on 121.5 MHz.

Air-to-air communications

Air-to-air communication between pilots in Australian FIRs may be conducted on frequency 123.45MHz. (refer to AIP GEN 3.4, 3.1.5 and ERSA NAV/COMM 4).

By maintaining 121.5 MHz for emergency use only, we can ensure that maximum consideration, assistance and priority is given to any aircraft known to, or believed to, be in a state of emergency.

Further information

For further information, please contact Airservices Safety Liaison:
Safety.Liaison@airservicesaustralia.com