

## **Coast Guard responding to series of recent suspected hoax distress calls**

### **Local News**

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Posted on : June 13, 2013 at 10:06 am

ASTORIA, Ore. &mdash; Coast Guard Sector Columbia River responded to five recent suspected hoax distress calls made from April 28 - June 1, 2013 near Portland, Ore. and Longview, Wash. Sector Columbia River launched a total of two MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter crews from Air Station Astoria and three 25-foot response boat crews from Station Portland in response to the calls, searching for more than seven hours and costing taxpayers an estimated \$50,000. Sector Columbia River received a Mayday call &ldquo;My boat is sinking I need help,&rdquo; on VHF Channel 16, April 28, 2013, but received no replies to subsequent callouts to the vessel. The call was traced to an area near Kelly Point, where the Columbia and Willamette Rivers converge. Sector Columbia River received a VHF Channel 16 call &ldquo;Mayday, Mayday,&rdquo; May 4, 2013, with no replies to callouts. The call was traced to Battleground Lake State Park, Wash. Sector Columbia River received this VHF Channel 16 call &ldquo;Help, I just turned my boat over, I need help, I need help, I need help, I just turned my boat over,&rdquo; with no replies, May 18, 2013. The call was traced to Hayden Island near Portland. Sorry, your browser does not support the audio element.

Sector Columbia River received a VHF Channel 16 call May 31, 2013, &ldquo;SOS, SOS,&rdquo; with a reply to callouts, &ldquo;I&rsquo;m by the 5.1 railroad bridge on the Willamette River.&rdquo; The call was traced to the area around the railroad bridge near downtown Portland. Sector Columbia River received a one-time VHF Channel 16 call &ldquo;We&rsquo;re sinking, Mayday, Mayday,&rdquo; June 1, 2013. The call was traced to Longview near the Lewis and Clark Bridge. Sector Columbia River issued urgent marine information broadcasts and launched assets in all five cases. Each case resulted in saturation of the search area with good Samaritans and other local search-and-rescue agency personnel and assets. No distress was found in any case. When the Coast Guard dispatches vessels and aircraft in cases of false distress, it not only drains limited resources, but needlessly puts our personnel at risk. Making a false distress call is a federal felony with a maximum penalty of five to 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, \$8,000 civil penalty and the possible reimbursement to the Coast Guard for the cost of performing the search. Boaters are reminded that they are responsible for the safety and actions of their passengers and are encouraged to educate them about the proper use of emergency equipment including a marine VHF radio. Oftentimes passengers, especially children, may not understand the consequences of playing on the radio and reporting false distress. In response to the high number of calls, the Coast Guard offers a reward of up to \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest and prosecution of anyone responsible for making a false distress or hoax call to the U.S. Coast Guard. Anyone with information regarding false distress calls is encouraged to contact the U.S. Coast Guard at (206) 220-7308.