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NOAA Satellites Help Save Six Fishermen from Atlantic Ocean

Six fishermen were rescued from the Atlantic Ocean 50 miles off the coast of North Carolina recently, thanks to environmental satellites in the international Search and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking Program, Cospas-Sarsat.

Satellites operated by the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and by the Russian government detected a distress signal from the 53-foot fishing vessel *Mediterranean Sea II* Jan. 6. The crew was airlifted by Coast Guard Search and Rescue teams.

The vessel, 50 miles southeast of Cape Fear, had electrical and engine room fires, and was without electricity and engine power in rough seas. A large wave hit the bow of the ship and destroyed the windscreen on the bridge. The vessel was taking on water.

The crew manually activated their 406 MHz emergency position-indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) after deploying their on-board pumps to control the flooding on the vessel. The signal from the emergency beacon was detected by the Cospas-Sarsat system, and NOAA notified the Coast Guard.

"While the cause of the incident is not yet known, six lives were saved by the use of properly working safety gear such as an EPIRB and lifejackets. With the EPIRB, we were able to quickly find their location and in this case able to save their lives," said LCDR Brendan McPherson, public affairs officer for the Coast Guard Atlantic Area Command, headquartered in Portsmouth, Va.

When the Coast Guard received the distress alert from NOAA, a search was started with air crews from Coast Guard Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C., in an HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter, a C-130 Hercules aircraft and an HH-65 Dolphin helicopter from Coast Guard Air Facility Charleston, S.C.

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The first helicopter on scene was the rescue helicopter from Air Facility Charleston finding the *Mediterranean Sea II* almost completely submerged and some fishermen jumping into the water. All of the fishermen were wearing survival suits and Personal Flotation Devices. Three fishermen were hoisted aboard the helicopter and taken to safety.

The helicopter from Air Station Elizabeth City arrived shortly and hoisted the three remaining fishermen to safety from 10-15 foot seas, sustained winds of 25 mph, and gusts nearing 50 mph. The fishermen were taken to North Myrtle Beach Grand Strand Airport, N.C., in good condition.

The crew of the *Mediterranean Sea II*, homeported in Little River, S.C., said they are thankful their emergency beacon saved the day. In an emergency, the equipment can mean the difference between life and death.

The Cospas-Sarsat system uses a constellation of satellites in geostationary and polar orbits to detect and locate emergency beacons on vessels and aircraft in distress. NOAA's Satellite and Data Service represents the United States in this program, providing satellite platforms and ground equipment, and operating the U.S. Mission Control Center.

NOAA's Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellites (GOES) can instantly detect emergency signals. The polar-orbiting satellites in the system detect emergency signals as they circle the Earth from pole to pole. Emergency signals are sent to the U.S. Mission Control Center at NOAA's National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service in Suitland, Md., then automatically sent to rescue forces around the world. Today there are 30 countries participating in the system. More than 12,000 lives have been saved worldwide since the system became operational in 1982.

NOAA's National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NOAA Satellite and Data Service) is the nation's primary source of space-based meteorological and climate data. NOAA Satellite and Data Service operates the nation's environmental satellites, which are used for weather forecasting, climate monitoring, and other environmental applications such as fire detection, ozone monitoring, and sea surface temperature measurements. NOAA Satellite and Data Service also operates three data centers, which house global data bases in climatology, oceanography, solid earth geophysics, marine geology and geophysics, solar-terrestrial physics, and paleoclimatology. To learn more about, please visit <http://www.nesdis.noaa.gov>

To learn more about NOAA's role in the Cospas-Sarsat program, please visit: <http://www.sarsat.noaa.gov>