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**NOAA SATELLITES HELP SAVE FOUR SAILORS
FROM ATLANTIC OCEAN**

Recently, four sailors were rescued from a life raft floating in the Atlantic Ocean 125 miles off the coast of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands 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 a 53-foot sailing vessel around 10:00 a.m. on Feb. 24. The vessel had sunk, and the four people onboard were adrift in a life raft when a Navy helicopter from Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, came to their aid. The four people were hoisted aboard the helicopter and taken to the Naval base.

As the vessel sank, its 406 MHz emergency position-indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) was activated. The signal was detected by the Cospas-Sarsat system, and NOAA notified the Coast Guard.

The U.S. Coast Guard's Rescue Sub-Center (RSC) in San Juan, Puerto Rico, contacted all agencies in the area requesting air support for a long-range offshore flight, but no aircraft were immediately available. San Juan RSC then contacted Coast Guard District 7 in Miami for additional air support. A Coast Guard C-130 Hercules (CG1712) was airborne in the Windward Pass and was diverted to the scene with about eight hours left of flight time. The aircraft received a strong signal from the 121.5 MHz homer in the EPIRB, and was able to home in on the life raft with the four persons on board. The C-130 deployed a small survival pack to the stranded sailors until they could be rescued.

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San Juan RSC again contacted Navy Helicopter Squadron VC-8 in Roosevelt Roads and was told that an H-3 Search and Rescue helicopter was now available. After a two hour flight from Puerto Rico, the H-3 arrived on scene and hoisted the four sailors from the life raft. None of the rescued were reported to have any serious injuries. The cause of the sinking is yet unknown, but weather conditions were reported to be less than favorable with winds around 25 knots and four-to-five-foot seas.

The crew of the sailing vessel said they are thankful their emergency beacon saved the day. In an emergency, the equipment can mean the difference between life and death.

“The Search and Rescue program is truly an international humanitarian program,” said Ajay Mehta, manager of NOAA’s Sarsat program. “This particular rescue illustrates the international aspect of the program. The vessel was registered with the United Kingdom and three of the people rescued were from Great Britain, the fourth was from Spain. Yet, U.S. search and rescue teams joined together to come to the aid of these individuals.”

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 National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NOAA 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 Satellite and Data Service in Suitland, Md., then automatically sent to rescue forces around the world. Today there are 35 countries participating in the system. More than 13,000 lives have been saved worldwide since the system became operational in 1982 and more than 4,500 in the United States alone. September of this year marks the 20th anniversary of the first Sarsat rescue.

NOAA’s Satellite and Data Service is the nation’s primary source of space-based meteorological and climate data. NOAA’s 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’s 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>