

Acquisition Update: Rescue 21 Logs 75,000th Search And Rescue Case

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The Coast Guard Rescue 21 communications system was employed in its 75,000th search and rescue case Jan. 15, 2015, since the service started tracking Rescue 21 caseloads in June 2010. The system is currently providing coverage of nearly 42,000 miles of coastline, including the entire Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts of the continental United States as well as along the shores of the Great Lakes, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Northern Marianas Islands.

Rescue 21 provides Coast Guard units – including Sector St. Petersburg, along the Gulf Coast of Florida, where the system was used to resolve more than 4,500 search and rescue cases – advanced features that make it easier for rescuers to locate vessels that call for assistance.

One feature that makes Rescue 21 so effective is its direction-finding capability. When the system receives a distress call, it generates a line of bearing from the tower to the source of the call. If the call is received on two or more towers, the system gives the Coast Guard more precise location information for the vessel in distress.

Rescue 21 also supports digital-selective calling, a radio technology that allows mariners to voicelessly transmit their vessel name, description and GPS location at the push of a button. The system's direction-finding capability and digital-selective calling support provide Coast Guard units with critical information, reducing the time needed for Coast Guard rescuers to locate vessels in distress.

The Coast Guard is currently deploying modified Rescue 21 capabilities in Alaska and along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, and the service's Research and Development Center is evaluating ways to make the system even more effective, including the possibility of incorporating 911 support and GPS tracking for cell phones.



The Rescue 21 tower in Pittsburg, California, provides VHF radio communication coverage for Suisun Bay, Grizzly Bay, and the San Joaquin River and is one of 258 towers deployed nationwide to support the R21 system. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Richard Kanehl.

