

News story: Distress alert helps HM Coastguard coordinate yacht rescue

A yacht with three people on board has been safely rescued after they sent an EPIRB distress alert that was picked up by HM Coastguard.



HM Coastguard's mission control centre (UK MCC) based at the National Maritime Operations Centre in Fareham, Hampshire, received the emergency position-indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) alert just before 7.50am on 11 June 2019 from a vessel in the vicinity of Plymouth Sound and immediately contacted Falmouth coastguard, who coordinated the rescue.

Around the same time, Falmouth coastguard received a VHF call from a yacht but due to the weather conditions the communications were lost during the call. Working with UKMCC, Falmouth coastguard confirmed that the call came from the same vessel as the EPIRB alert.

RNLI Plymouth and Salcombe all-weather lifeboats and Newquay coastguard helicopter were sent to assist in the search and rescue mission. A Mayday relay broadcast was also sent to other vessels in the area requesting they offer assistance in locating the vessel.

Soon after the helicopter launched the UK MCC confirmed that the yacht was issuing a 121.5 MHz homing beacon, which allowed the helicopter to home in on the vessel's location, just south of the Eddystone lighthouse.

Upon reaching the vessel in rough sea conditions, it was found in that it had suffered engine failure and the sails had blown through due to a squall. The helicopter winchman was lowered on to the deck of the vessel to check that all was well with the three people on board, and they were confirmed to be safe and well.

The RNLI Plymouth and Salcombe lifeboats remained on scene and established a tow with the vessel and towed it to Salcombe harbour.

Dai Jones, HM Coastguard duty controller, said: "This rescue mission demonstrated excellent coordination between the UK MCC and Falmouth coastguard, along with the helicopter and lifeboat crews.

The skipper of the vessel did the right thing in activating the homing beacon, which allowed us to quickly identify their location and send help."