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A MAYDAY CALL IS AN INTERNATIONAL DISTRESS SIGNAL USED IN AVIATION AND MARITIME COMMUNICATION TO INDICATE A GRAVE AND IMMINENT THREAT TO LIFE OR THE VESSEL/AIRCRAFT ITSELF BY SOS

Dr. Dhrubo Jyoti Sen*

School of Pharmacy, Techno India University, Salt Lake, Sector-V, Kolkata-700091, West Bengal, India.

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Corresponding Author Dr. Dhrubo Jyoti Sen

School of Pharmacy, Techno India University, Salt Lake, Sector-V, Kolkata-700091, West Bengal, India. Email Id: dhrubosen69@yahoo.com,

ABSTRACT

A "Mayday" call by a pilot signifies an extreme, life-threatening emergency, demanding immediate assistance. It's a globally recognized distress signal, essentially meaning "come and help me". The pilot repeats the word "Mayday" three times, followed by their aircraft's call sign, location, and the nature of the emergency. This triggers a prioritized response from air traffic control and rescue services, who clear the frequency, coordinate rescue efforts, and provide guidance. Mayday" is an internationally recognized distress signal used in maritime and aviation contexts to indicate an imminent threat to life or a vessel. It signifies a situation of grave and imminent danger, requiring immediate assistance. The term is derived from the French "m'aider," meaning "help me". In the context of the Navy, a "Mayday" call would be used when a naval vessel or personnel are in a life-threatening situation, such as a fire, sinking, or other critical emergency.

KEYWORDS: Mayday, PanPan, help me, air traffic control, rescue, SOS, navigation.

OVERVIEW: While both signals require quick attention, a Mayday indicates a situation where immediate rescue or intervention is necessary. Both calls follow international protocols and must be repeated **three times** when transmitted to ensure they are clearly understood. The "Mayday" distress signal was invented by **Frederick Stanley Mockford**, a British radio officer at Croydon Airport in London, in 1923. He chose the term "Mayday" because it sounded like the French phrase "**m'aider**," meaning "**help me**," making it easily

understandable for both pilots and ground staff during emergencies, especially with air traffic between Croydon and Le Bourget Airport in Paris. Mayday is an emergency procedure word used internationally as a distress signal in voice-procedure radio communications. The Mayday call sign was originated in 1923 by Frederick Stanley Mockford (08 December 1897–1 March 1962). A senior radio officer at Croydon Airport in London, Mockford was asked to think of a word that would indicate distress and would easily be understood by all pilots and ground staff in an emergency.



Figure-1: Inventor of MayDay.

It is used to signal a life-threatening emergency primarily by aviators and mariners, but in some countries local organizations such as fire-fighters, police forces, and transportation organizations also use the term. Convention requires the word be repeated three times in a row during the initial emergency declaration ("**Mayday mayday mayday**"). The "mayday" procedure word was conceived as a distress call in the early 1920s by Frederick Stanley Mockford, officer-in-charge of radio at Croydon Airport, England.^[1]



Figure-2: May day call in aviation & marine.

Since much of the air traffic at the time was between Croydon and Le Bourget Airport in Paris, he proposed the term "mayday", the phonetic equivalent of the French *m'aider*. The initial communication, and if considered necessary, any subsequent transmissions by an aircraft in distress should begin with the signal MAYDAY, preferably repeated three times.

In aviation, "Mayday" is an internationally recognized distress signal used by pilots to indicate imminent danger or a life-threatening emergency situation. Derived from the French phrase "m'aider", meaning "help me," it is transmitted via radio to air traffic control or other aircraft nearby. A mayday fire call is a universal distress signal used by fire-fighters to communicate life-threatening situations. This call is typically made when a fire-fighter is lost, trapped, injured, or otherwise unable to evacuate safely. A Mayday call is an internationally recognised distress signal used primarily in aviation and maritime communication to indicate a life-threatening emergency. It was first introduced in the 1920s and is now a standard protocol globally.

Table-1: May day call justifications.

Aspect	Details
Word Used	"Mayday" – repeated three times ("Mayday, Mayday, Mayday") to avoid confusion.
Origin	Derived from the French term "m'aidez" meaning "help me."
Purpose	To signal grave and imminent danger (e.g., engine failure, fire, sinking ship, medical emergency).
Who Can Use It	Pilots, ship captains, or anyone in immediate danger requiring urgent help.
Communication Channels	Usually over radio frequencies (e.g., VHF Channel 16 for maritime or 121.5 MHz for aviation).
International Status	Recognised under international regulations by ICAO (aviation) and IMO (maritime).

- When it's used: Mayday calls are reserved for situations where there is a grave and imminent danger to life, such as engine failure, fire, loss of control, or other catastrophic events explains NDTV.
- How it's made: The call is made by the person in command (pilot or captain) of a vehicle or vessel, usually by repeating the word "Mayday" three times says Hindustan Times.
- What happens next: Upon receiving a Mayday call, all other radio traffic on that frequency is cleared, and ATC (Air Traffic Control) or other emergency services focus on coordinating a rescue effort. The person making the call provides details about their location, the nature of the emergency, and any other relevant information to aid in the rescue process. Mayday is an emergency procedure word used internationally as a distress signal in voice-procedure radio communications.

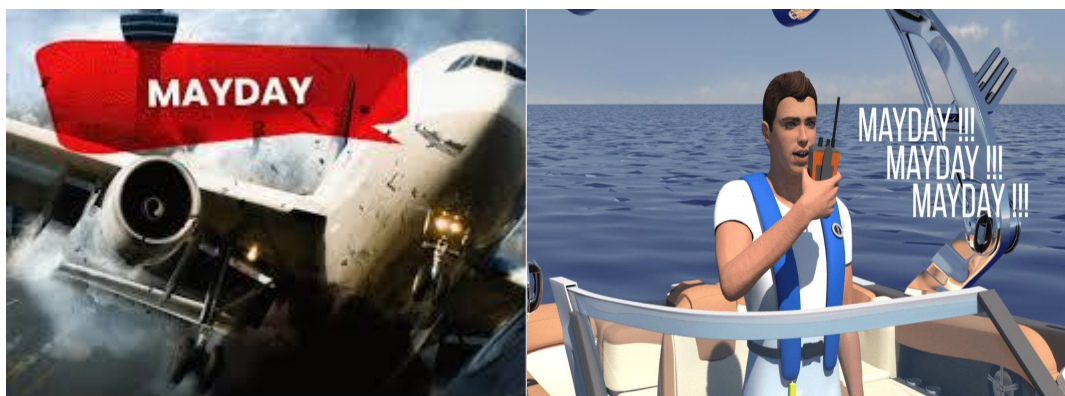


Figure-3: May day help.

It is used to signal a life-threatening emergency primarily by aviators and mariners, but in some countries local organizations such as fire-fighters, police forces, and transportation organizations also use the term. Convention requires the word be repeated three times in a row during the initial emergency declaration ("Mayday mayday mayday"). A Mayday call is an international distress signal used in aviation and maritime communication to indicate a grave and imminent threat to life or the vessel/aircraft itself. It signifies a situation where immediate assistance is required, such as fire, sinking, or loss of control. The term originates from the French phrase "m'aider," meaning "help me".

A Mayday call is an international distress signal used in aviation and maritime communication to indicate a grave and imminent threat to life or the vessel/aircraft itself. It signifies a situation where immediate assistance is required, such as fire, sinking, or loss of control.

- **Urgent nature:** Mayday calls are reserved for situations where there's a serious and immediate danger, requiring immediate action from rescue services.
- **International recognition:** It's a globally recognized signal, ensuring that anyone hearing the call understands the severity of the situation and can respond accordingly.
- **Used in aviation and maritime:** Mayday calls are used by pilots and ship captains when facing life-threatening emergencies.
- **Clear and unambiguous communication:** The term "Mayday" is repeated three times to clearly distinguish it from other radio traffic and ensure it's understood even in noisy or chaotic environments.
- **Response from authorities:** Upon hearing a Mayday call, air traffic control or other relevant authorities will clear the radio frequency, focus on the distressed vessel/aircraft, and coordinate rescue efforts.

Not to be confused with other distress signals: While both Mayday and "SOS" are distress signals, Mayday is specifically used in radiotelephony, particularly in aviation and maritime contexts, while SOS is a more general distress signal, often used in Morse code or written form.

False Mayday calls can be illegal: Making a false Mayday call is a serious offense and can result in legal penalties. As with normal operations, the pilot remains in command of his aircraft at all times and is responsible for determining the safest course of action, such as where and when to land.^[2]



Figure-4: May Day call in flight & ship.

A 'mayday' call indicates an aircraft is in grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance. Pilots say "Mayday" in emergencies because it's the internationally recognized distress signal for life-threatening situations, specifically when immediate help is needed. The term originates from the French phrase "m'aider," meaning "help me". It's repeated three times ("**Mayday, Mayday, Mayday**") to ensure clarity and urgency in communication, especially over radio frequencies. The primary purpose of "Mayday" is to signal a severe, life-threatening emergency where immediate assistance is required. It's an internationally recognized distress signal, primarily used in aviation and maritime contexts, but also sometimes by other emergency services. The term is a direct translation of the French phrase "m'aider," meaning "help me," and its repetition three times, "Mayday mayday mayday," ensures the message is clearly understood amidst potential radio interference.

Table-2: Phrases of May day call.

Type of Call	Purpose	Phrase Used
Mayday	Life-threatening emergency	"Mayday"
Pan-Pan	Urgency (not life-threatening)	"Pan-Pan"
Securité	Safety information (e.g., weather alert)	"Securité"

- **Urgent Distress Signal:** "Mayday" is the most urgent level of distress call, indicating a situation where lives are in immediate danger.
- **International Recognition:** It's universally understood by pilots, mariners, and other emergency personnel, ensuring rapid communication and response.
- **Aviation and Maritime Use:** While primarily used in aviation and maritime, some countries extend its usage to other organizations like fire-fighters, police, and transportation services.
- **Radio Communication:** It's employed in voice-procedure radio communications, where the word is repeated three times to enhance clarity.
- **French Origin:** The term originates from the French phrase "m'aider," highlighting its purpose as a call for help.
- **Prompt Response:** When a "Mayday" call is made, it prompts an immediate and prioritized response from relevant authorities, like Air Traffic Control or rescue teams, to ensure swift assistance.

The term "Mayday" is not an abbreviation but a distress signal derived from the French word "m'aider," meaning "help me". It's an internationally recognized call used in aviation and maritime communication to indicate a life-threatening emergency where immediate assistance is needed. When a Mayday call is made, it signals a grave and imminent danger to a vessel or persons.

Origin: The term "Mayday" was adopted as a phonetic equivalent of the French phrase "m'aider" to ensure clear and unambiguous communication of distress.

Purpose: In aviation and maritime contexts, Mayday is the most urgent distress signal, reserved for situations where there is an immediate threat to life or the vessel.

Usage: When a Mayday call is made, it is typically repeated three times ("Mayday, Mayday, Mayday") to ensure it is clearly heard and understood by air traffic control or other relevant authorities.

Significance: A Mayday call immediately prioritizes rescue and emergency response efforts, as it signifies a critical situation requiring immediate action.

False Alarms: Making a false Mayday call can have serious consequences, including potential prosecution.

CONCLUSION

Mayday is the crucial emergency protocol, which is used for life-saving during critical situations in aviation emergencies and also in maritime contexts. It ensures a quick and faster response for immediate communication to rescue the passengers. A Mayday call is used in very critical conditions when there is a life-threatening situation. As the Mayday call triggers a faster response from the ground staff to ensure immediate communications to help or rescue the passengers before the crash. The phrase "Mayday" is repeated three times (Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!) in a distress call to ensure it's clearly understood, especially over radio communication where background noise or interference could make it difficult to hear. This repetition helps to prevent miscommunication and ensures that the emergency call is recognized as a serious distress signal.

Clarity and Recognition: Repeating the distress call three times ensures that it stands out from other radio chatter and is easily identifiable as a Mayday call.

Avoiding Confusion: In situations with poor radio quality or multiple transmissions, the repetition helps to distinguish the Mayday call from other sounds or words that might be similar.

Global Standard: "Mayday" is an internationally recognized distress signal, and its repetition is a standard protocol in aviation and maritime distress situations.

Immediate Action: When a Mayday call is received, it triggers immediate action from air traffic control or other emergency services, navigation, prioritizing the distressed vessel or aircraft.

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