

# **EPIRB Guides Coast Guard to Fishermen Adrift in Tropical Storm**

*Written and provided to the U.S. Coast Guard by ACR Electronics, Inc.*

Two days into the hurricane season, a 45-foot, long-line fishing vessel, Sylvania Jean, was caught in Tropical Storm Barry and began sinking after its rudder fell off in rough seas and winds. The captain was able to put life jackets on his two crewmen, radio a mayday call and activate his ACR Electronics' SATELLITE2 406™ emergency position-indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) before evacuating to a life raft 85 miles east of Cape Canaveral. In the tumult, a non-swimming crewmate, was pitched into 18-foot seas and was lost from sight. The other two were able to scramble into the life raft.

Search and rescue (SAR) coordinators at Coast Guard Sector Mayport, Fla., heard an unclear mayday call around 8 a.m. but soon lost communications. Within five minutes SAR coordinators at Coast Guard District Seven Command Center in Miami received a signal from an EPIRB identified as being sent from the Sylvania Jean. Since the satellite-detectable EPIRB was registered, it supplied the Coast Guard with critical information and GPS coordinates necessary to launch a full-scale search.

“Once their EPIRB went off, it provided us with all the information we needed. With the mayday, we knew people were in distress and their approximate position but without an EPIRB and the exact location of their distress, it made the difference in finding them or not finding them at all,” said Petty Officer Dana Warr.

Just after 9 a.m., a HC-130 and HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter were launched from Air Station Clearwater. The 378-foot Coast Guard Cutter, Dallas, was diverted to assist in the search. The helicopter pilot-in-command, LTjg Brian Mushet, said with Tropical Storm Barry pushing through the state, heavy rains, squall lines and 30-knot gusts required instrument flight rules (IFR).

Once on scene flying at 300 feet, Mushet reported spotting the orange roof and sea anchor of the survivors' life raft within 100-200 feet of the EPIRB signal. He said dropping the rescue swimmer down was challenging with 38-knot gusts, 18-foot seas and eight-foot swells. His co-pilot constantly called wave height, as Mushet watched the raft, maintained a hover and kept the craft steady enough to recover the survivors and rescue swimmer. “During each deployment of the rescue swimmer, the first mate had to carefully time each wave while talking to me ‘left, right, forward, after’ to maintain a decent hover. This was all in unison,” Mushet explained.

With everyone safely on board, the helicopter joined the HC-130 to search for the fisherman who fell overboard. Three miles east, the crew spotted debris and a survivor clinging to a wooden box. At 3:45 p.m, he was safely hoisted up, wrapped in blankets and the three were flown to Cape Canaveral Hospital, where they were reported in good condition.

Even though Mushet described the demanding rescue as “just in a day’s work” he said without the EPIRB, the Coast Guard likely would have never found the fishermen in those kinds of conditions. “It probably would’ve turned into a multi-day rescue attempt,” he said.

A PLB is a satellite-signaling device of last resort, for use when all other means of self-rescue have been exhausted and where the situation is deemed to be grave and imminent, and the loss of life, limb, eyesight or valuable property will occur without assistance. All beacons must be registered following purchase. Simply go online to [www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov](http://www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov).

**USCG**