



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DISTRESS FLARES ARE NOT FIREWORKS

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Fort Myers Beach Flotilla 91 Reminds Boaters That Distress Flares Are Not Fireworks

FORT MYERS BEACH, FL – June 30, 2026 – As Southwest Florida prepares for the Fourth of July weekend, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 91 is issuing a critical reminder to all boaters: distress flares are lifesaving tools, not fireworks.

Launching a distress flare without an actual emergency is a federal crime. Deploying a hoax flare triggers a false Coast Guard search-and-rescue response. Violators face severe penalties, including:

- Fines up to \$250,000
- 6 to 10 years in federal prison
- Full restitution for the massive operational costs incurred by the Coast Guard

"Every false alarm diverts critical rescue assets away from real emergencies," says Gary Martell, Flotilla Commander for Flotilla 91. "We want everyone to enjoy the fireworks from the water, but safety must come first."

Tips for a Safe Fourth on the Water:

- **Expect Congestion:** Waterways will be packed, especially right after the finale. Be patient and allow extra travel time.
- **Check Your Gear:** Ensure all required safety equipment is on board and your navigation lights are fully operational before sunset.
- **Designate a Sober Skipper:** If your boat is partying, your captain shouldn't be. Operating a vessel under the influence is just as dangerous—and illegal—as drunk driving.

About the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 91: The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is the uniformed civilian volunteer component of the United States Coast Guard. Flotilla 91, based in Fort Myers Beach, has been dedicated to promoting boating safety through public education,

vessel safety checks, and active mission support, including search and rescue and environmental protection, for over 20 years.

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FOR CELEBRATION.
(NOT AN EMERGENCY!)**

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**MARINE DISTRESS FLARE:
FOR EMERGENCY**

**MARINE DISTRESS FLARE:
FOR EMERGENCY ONLY!
CALL 911 OR VHF 16.**

A Public Service Announcement
by The U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary
Fort Myers Beach

EMERGENCY SERVICES WILL RESPOND.

HOAX CALLS AND MISUSE OF FLARES ARE ILLEGAL AND MAY RESULT IN
FINES AND PROSECUTION. **DO NOT SIGNAL A FALSE EMERGENCY.**

U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

PUBLIC SAFETY CAMPAIGN



Come back to us ALIVE!