



Loch Ness RNLI head out to rescue the stranded paddleboarder in September. Credit: RNLI Loch Ness

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Ocean Signal: Ocean Signal rescueME EDF1 Guides RNLI Loch Ness to Stranded Paddleboarder

Electronic distress flare proves crucial in directing emergency services to exact location of casualty in challenging Force 5 conditions

The volunteer RNLI crew on Loch Ness has highlighted the value of including an LED flare in any boat or personal watersports safety kit after they were successfully guided to an endurance paddleboarder stranded without his board in 6-degree water.

The paddleboarder was competing in September's two-day 92km Great Glen Challenge, the final race of the 2018 UK Paddle Endurance Series, when he was sent overboard in Force 5 conditions, breaking the tether. He was able to inflate his PFD and call 999, but was in the water for up to 20 minutes before he was initially recovered by fellow paddlers, Carl and Maria Sawyer.

Fortunately, Carl was carrying a compact [Ocean Signal rescueME EDF1](#) Electronic Distress Flare – a lightweight LED device that burns for six hours and fits easily into a grab bag or pocket. Using the EDF1, they were able to quickly attract the attention of the lifeboat and guide the crew to them in the middle of dozens of other paddleboards on the Loch. The casualty was quickly transferred onto the lifeboat where crew tried to keep him as warm as possible before proceeding to Foyers campsite, where the coastguard helicopter had landed, enabling the casualty to receive medical treatment as quickly as possible. He was subsequently airlifted to Raigmore Hospital, Inverness, and made a full recovery.

Carl said: “We had been paddling for around 2 hours. Conditions were challenging with winds averaging force 5/6 and a large wave building on Loch Ness. I saw the casualty off to my right side, only around 30-40 meters away but he had been in the water for quite a few minutes without his board and was starting to feel the effects of the cold water.

“He had already called 999 and was talking to them when I came alongside. I took over the call, gave the emergency services exact position from my GPS watch and informed them we would have a visible red LED flare to locate. RNLI Loch Ness had been scrambled with an ETA of 20 minutes. We managed to get him on our boards rafted up and covered him up and even managed to get a pair of waterproof trousers on him to keep the wind off.

“The RNLI arrived in good time and made directly for us, commenting instantly on how useful the LED was for locating us, with the amount of paddle boarders spread over a large area, they knew exactly who to head for. At this point he was very pale and shivering continuously. I would like to think that in this instance carrying the correct safety equipment saved vital minutes in the rescue. Particularly with the swift manner of location. He made a full recovery and we saw him later that evening at the prize giving looking a lot warmer than earlier!”

As reported on its Facebook page, Loch Ness RNLI lifeboat was launched with

Jamie Mac at the helm and with Leanne, Sandy and David as crew following reports of a paddleboarder in the water near Foyers at about 8.30am.

They said: “With force 5 conditions and a number of paddleboarders making their way up the Loch, navigation was a challenge. The crew were able to locate the three relatively quickly thanks to the boarders’ use of an LED beacon, and the very cold casualty was quickly taken on board the lifeboat.”

Michael Avril, Community Safety Officer for Scotland, added: “The LED flare was vitally important in this situation, as navigation was very difficult. It was very easy to spot and really helpful in locating which paddleboarder needed help as there so many of them out that morning. We would certainly recommend that paddleboarders and other watersports enthusiasts carry one as it is a low-tech solution that is really effective. Whenever a red flare is spotted, the Coast Guard will task a lifeboat.

He continued: “For a communication device, we would suggest carrying a hand-held VHF radio, as this can be used to reach not only the coastguard and emergency services, it may also summon help from other water users in the vicinity. Some modern VHF radios are also equipped with a DSC button (Digital Selective Calling) which automatically transmits a distress alert and details of your location. At the very least we would advise carrying a mobile phone as a means of calling for help, by dialling 999 and asking for the coastguard. The phone should be kept in a waterproof pouch, and on your person. The same applies to both radio and phone, if you end up in the water your communication device is of no use if you can’t reach it.

“Once the alarm has been raised, use of a flare is an effective method of directing the emergency services to the correct location. Modern EVDS (Electronic Visual Distress Signals) are a means of highlighting your location for a reasonable period. Visible for up to seven miles, the beacon is usually a series of low powered LEDs which helps prolong battery life. The unit can be turned on and off as required, and the batteries are user replaceable. Such a device can also be thrown to a person in the water to aid their recovery.”

The RNLI offers the following advice to paddleboarders, most of which is also relevant to sit-down paddlers such as canoeists and kayakers, and other watersport participants:

- Always tell someone where you are going and when you’ll be

back. Don't leave the house without a mobile phone or communication device.

- Check the weather forecast and tide times before you set out – they can change quickly.
- Avoid offshore winds.
- Always go with a friend.
- Wear a suitable personal floatation device.
- Wear suitable clothing for the time of year.
- Always wear your leash and hold onto your board if you get into trouble – it will help you float.
- Always make sure you launch and recover between the black and white chequered flags. Consider other water users by learning the rights of way in the surf. This can save you and others getting injured.
- Get the appropriate level of training.

All the participants in the UK Endurance event had open water experience and full safety kit, including a compulsory leash, and organisers say this year's incident was the first in over 50 races during the past five years. In 2019, it will be compulsory for every paddler to wear a tracker attached to their person. Carl and Maria Sawyer carried on with the race and completed the 92km in 13.5 hours with Maria taking 1st overall women.

The [rescueME EDF1](#) measures 187mm (length) by 42mm (width) and weighs just 155g (5.5oz). It has four different modes of operation – Economy, High, Ultra and Forward Beam - plus SOS signalling. Suitable for one-handed operation in difficult conditions and waterproof to 10 metres, the rescueME EDF1 has a visibility range of up to seven miles and up to six hours' operation.

For further information about Ocean Signal's products, visit www.oceansignal.com.

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About Ocean Signal

Communication and safety at sea specialist Ocean Signal™ is dedicated to providing the technology and quality of product that will set industry standards.

Ocean Signal's product portfolio consists of the rescueME range of products, including the rescueME PLB1, the rescueME MOB1, the rescueME EPIRB1 and the rescueME EDF1 electronic distress flare, plus the AIS Alarm Box, and the SafeSea range of GMDSS products, including the E100 and E100G EPIRB, S100 SART and V100 handheld VHF radio, as well as the M100 and M100X professional MSLD and E101V float-free EPIRB with integrated voyage data record memory capsule. They provide both recreational and commercial mariners with simple to use, compact and affordable life-saving solutions. All products are engineered by a highly experienced team of marine electronics professionals.

Ocean Signal products are trusted by high-profile sailors, rowers, surfers and powerboat racing teams. Providing some of the world's best competitors and adventurers with vital safety and communication devices, the rescueME MOB1 and rescuePLB1 were integrated with the Spinlock lifejacket and personal equipment packs for the crews in the Volvo Ocean Race 2017-18 and the rescueME MOB1 was also selected to enhance safety standards for crew taking part in the Clipper 2017-18 Round the World Yacht Race. Ocean Signal has also sponsored the crew of Simply Fun with rescueME MOB1s, rescueME PLBs and a rescueME EPIRB1 in the 2016 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race, the 16-man crew of Triton with rescueME MOB1s in the 2015 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race, record-breaking sailor Andrea Mura in the single-handed OSTAR race, Mini Transat 2015 solo sailor Lizzy Foreman, ocean rowing teams including Ocean Valour, Ocean Brothers and Carbon Zero and solo rower Lia Ditton, Venture Cup offshore powerboat race team Cinzano, kite racer Gina Hewson and canoeist Adam Weymouth.

Safety and communication products from Ocean Signal offer exceptional value, meeting or exceeding international technical and safety standards. Careful design and innovation provides commercial shipping, fishing and recreational users the confidence that their Ocean Signal equipment will work to, and beyond, their expectations when it is needed most.