



MayDay 2011

The meaning of MayDay

MayDay for cultural heritage fuses two concepts - the distress signal, and the first day of May – in order to create a memorable calendar date for events that improve disaster preparedness in archives, galleries, libraries and museums.

The MayDay call was originated in 1923 by Frederick Stanley Mockford (1897–1962). As senior radio officer at Croydon Airport in London, Mockford was asked to think of a word that would indicate distress and be understood by all pilots and ground staff in an emergency. Since much of the traffic at the time was between Croydon and Le Bourget Airport in Paris, he proposed the word "MayDay" from the French *m'aider* meaning 'help me'.

Since then, MayDay is the international distress signal, used in radio communications by many groups including the police, pilots and fire-fighters. The call is always given three times in a row ("MayDay MayDay MayDay") to prevent mistaking it for some similar-sounding phrase under noisy conditions, and to distinguish an actual MayDay call from a message about a MayDay call.

A MayDay situation is one in which a vessel, aircraft, vehicle, or person is in grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance. Examples of "grave and imminent danger" in which a MayDay call would be appropriate include fire, explosion or sinking. MayDay calls can be made on any radio frequency, and when a MayDay call is made no other radio traffic is permitted except to assist in the emergency. A MayDay call may only be made when life or craft is in imminent danger of death or destruction. Making a hoax MayDay call is a criminal act in many countries because of the danger to the rescuers' lives that a search-and-rescue operation can create, as well as the very high costs of such rescue efforts.

About Blue Shield

Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of Red Cross, and works to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by wars and natural disasters.

Blue Shield Australia is recognised by the International Committee of the Blue Shield as its Australian national committee. The committee is a federation of the Australian representatives of four of the pillar bodies of the International Committee of the Blue Shield (i.e. the International Council on Archives, the International Council of Museums, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and the International Federation of Library Associations).

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