

Ship Report Transcript

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By Joanne Rideout

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Let's start like we usually do with a look at our marine weather And then I want to talk about the origin of since it is May 1st, May Day.

I want to talk about the historical origins of May Day as a holiday, but also it has a very important contemporary maritime use, the phrase May Day and we'll talk about that.

So marine weather, we have high pressure bringing calmer conditions through this morning. But then another weather system is due later today. That brings rain back into the forecast. And you see this weather pattern here happening at the change of seasons. We see it a lot at winter going into spring and we see it in summer going into fall where the weather seesaws back and forth between sunshine and rain. And so we're getting that one one day it's raining, the next day it's sunny. So just enjoy the sun breaks and enjoy the rain too, because that's part of what makes it so beautiful here. Today's forecasts include south southwest winds 5 to 10 knots, gusting to 15 in the afternoon. Wind waves from the southwest, one foot high at 4 seconds apart. West swell, six feet at 9 seconds apart and a chance of showers in the afternoon.

And and a little bit about Astoria tides today. We have low tide happening around 2:30 p.m. in Astoria, high tide around 9 p.m.. Now tides happen at different times in different places. Always check the tides before you head to the water. There are lots of tide apps for your phone or tablet and you can also find local tides online at saltwater tides dot com.

And a quick look at our inbound schedule. The American Freedom came into the river early this morning from San Francisco, headed for Portland. She's a petroleum tanker delivering refined petroleum to Portland, passing Astoria around 2:30 a.m. in Portland by about 8:30 this morning.

And we have the Cumbria arriving from Japan, headed for the Astoria Anchorage. She's going to be picking up potash eventually upriver. She'll be in the Astoria Anchorage by about 9:30 a.m..

Well, today on the calendar, it's May Day, the first day of May. So I thought we could talk about that a little bit, both historically and from a maritime perspective. Here's a little bit about the history of May Day as a holiday. This is from the History Channel. Quote: May Day is a May 1st celebration with a long and varied history dating back millennia. Throughout the years, there have been many different events and festivities worldwide, most with the express purpose of welcoming in a change of seasons spring in the Northern Hemisphere in the 19th century, May Day took on a new meaning as an International Worker's Day grew out of the 19th century labor movement for workers rights and an eight hour workday in the United States. Close quote. That's from the History Channel.

Now, the Celts of the British Isles considered May 1st May Day to be the most important day of the year when the Festival of Beltane was held. This May Day festival was thought to divide the year in half between the light and the dark. Symbolic fire was one of the main rituals of the festival, helping to celebrate the return of life and fertility to the world. another popular tradition of May Day involves the maypole. People would dance around a pole clad with colorful streamers and ribbons. So that's some of the historical celebration of May Day.

But there's a real life, very nautical use of the term May Day, that has nothing to do with any of that, but is something that you might hear any day of the year if you listen to VHF radio Channel 16. If someone is in trouble at sea, you might hear them on the VHF radio, on their vessel calling the Coast Guard on Channel 16. You might hear them say, mayday, mayday, mayday. Followed by the name of their vessel.

The Coast Guard continuously monitors channel 16 and responds to mayday calls and other requests for aid. And they can use the VHF signal to get a fix on where the vessel is located, Even if the people on the vessel are not sure where they are.

So in this context, what is the origin of that term, “mayday”? Well, mayday is an emergency procedure word that is used internationally as a distress signal in radio communications. So people all over the world speaking all manner of languages, all understand the term mayday as a distress signal. It's used by aviators and mariners to signal a life threatening emergency.

And in some countries, local organizations, such as firefighters, police and transportation organizations also use the term mayday. Convention requires the word be repeated three times in a row during the initial emergency declaration.

So you'll hear Mayday, mayday, mayday, usually followed, as I said, by the vessel's name. So this is the sailing vessel Melody, or whatever the vessel's name is. Where did it come from? Well, it has nothing to do with May 1st.

The Mayday procedure word was conceived as a distress call in the early 1920s by Frederick Stanley Mockford, who was an officer at an English airport. He'd been asked to think up a word that would indicate distress and would easily be understood by all pilots and ground staff in an emergency. Since much of the air traffic at the time was between England and France, he proposed the term mayday, which is the phonetic equivalent of the French expression mayday, which means help me: m'aidez , which is from the French verb aider, and it's a short form of “venez m'aider.” Which means “come and help me.”

So that is the modern use of the term mayday. And you can hear it any day of the year in contemporary emergency radio communications. but those aren't the only terms you're likely to hear on VHF Radio Channel 16. Another term is “pan pan,” which is derived from another French word. It's from the French “panne,” meaning a breakdown. And it indicates an urgent situation such as a mechanical failure or a medical problem of lesser severity than a grave and imminent threat requiring immediate assistance.

Now the Coast Guard might respond to a pan pan call on VHF radio by asking if a vessel needs an escort, if not a rescue, or whether the vessel is just asking for the Coast Guard to keep an eye on them in case conditions worsen.

Another word you might hear on Channel 16 is securite. That's another French word like it sounds in English. It means security. And it too, is often repeated three times securite, securite, securite. It's a procedural word used on maritime radio that warns the crew that the following message is important safety information. The most common use of this is for broadcasting navigational warnings and meteorological information. Now, navigational warnings are issued regularly, and they usually give information about people or vessels in distress or objects or events that can be an immediate danger to people at sea It is normal practice to broadcast the security call on a distress and listening frequency like VHF Channel 16.

Why so much French? Well, French is an official language in 28 countries and is spoken across all continents. At one time it was the international language before English became more prevalent during World War Two. About 50 countries and territories have French as an official or de facto official, administrative or cultural language.

Now we know that Mayday and Pan Pan are not messages that anyone wants to hear because they indicate problems. But those transmitting are lucky to have our Coast Guard listening and ready to lend a hand.

Meanwhile, go out and enjoy this mayday. Maybe put a flower in your hair. We're almost halfway through the year and summer is coming.

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