

# Darwin at the forefront of MOB safety

## The Port of Darwin's new MOB system has made the water a safer workplace for pilots and wharf workers

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### Introduction

Several Australian port authorities who have recognized the man overboard risk faced every day by their pilots, tugboat crew and wharf workers are breaking new ground to mitigate the consequences by adopting innovative alerting and locating technology.

### The importance of man overboard systems

Although highly trained and experienced, pilots are most at risk during transit and transfer to ships. Likewise, wharf workers operate high alongside the water and risk not being seen should they fall in, whilst the nature of tugboat work and their sometimes extreme operation can contribute to crew falling overboard. In all cases, notification of the man overboard (MOB) incident and subsequent retrieval of the casualty as quickly as possible is critical to their survival.

Man overboard incidents within these fields of work are often witnessed by colleagues and swift action can be taken, but paradoxically, should somebody fall into the water unseen, it may be some time before their absence is noted. Since the probability of survival following an MOB event is directly related to the length of time in the water, knowing that the event has occurred and where to locate the victim is vital to securing their safe rescue.

This is why Mobilarm developed its V100 VHF locator beacon. This pocket-sized device is attached to clothing or lifejackets and is automatically water-activated when the wearer falls overboard. Unlike satellite-tracked 406MHz Personal Locator Beacons (PLB) that alert land-based rescue coordination centers, the Mobilarm V100 uses VHF radio to directly alert the victim's own vessel and other vessels in the vicinity, because those people are best positioned to bring about a quick and effective rescue. Uniquely, it sends out a man overboard distress alert and real-time GPS coordinates of the casualty's position via VHF DSC, and in a synthesized voice on channel 16.

### Implementation at the Port of Darwin

The pilots operating in the Australian Port of Darwin have implemented the Mobilarm V100 across the entire fleet because they recognize the benefits of receiving the MOB alert on their own vessels' radio within seconds of the incident occurring. Being able to react instantly and knowing the victim's position gives them a powerful advantage for affecting the outcome of the emergency.

Having recognized the V100's capabilities, the Darwin pilots recommended it to other Australian pilots at the OHS conference in Perth. Subsequently, it has been ratified as the most appropriate solution for decreasing workplace risk for pilots.

The V100 is now integrated within the Darwin pilots' Personal Flotation Devices (PFD), and forms part of their everyday safety routine. Regardless of how unlikely it is that a pilot falls overboard, the organization realizes how serious the consequences could be, so chose Mobilarm V100 to augment its risk mitigation strategy. Feedback so far shows that the entire team appreciates the value that the automated alert and transmitted GPS coordinates offer in ensuring they will be quickly retrieved if they fall overboard.

Following Darwin's lead, and the acceptance of the V100 as the appropriate solution for decreasing workplace risk, Port Authorities in Broome and Geraldton, and the Tasmanian Ports



Left: The Mobilarm V100 VHF locator beacon has been integrated into pilots' PFDs at the Port of Darwin.

Right: The V100 transmits a man overboard distress alert and real-time GPS coordinates of the casualty's position when the device hits the water.

Corporation have also implemented the Mobilarm V100 for use by their pilots, line haulers, barges and tugs.

The increased interest by port stakeholders in the risk of MOB and the Mobilarm V100 follows the early adoption of the device in 2009 by Fortescue Metals Group (FMG) for its ship loading facilities at Port Hedland, Western Australia. The company, which is the third largest mining company in Australia, identified the risk to life if a person falls off the wharf and chose the V100 to ensure they know immediately when and where it has happened. The V100 is particularly relevant at Port Hedland because workers are frequently out of sight on the 2km-long wharf, which increases the risk of an undetected MOB event even more.

The importance of quick detection and location of a MOB cannot be underestimated. This was demonstrated when Mobilarm first met with the Captain of the Northern Territory pilots fleet. The Darwin customs vessel was returning from a routine patrol and came across three fishermen, completely by chance, who had fallen overboard from their vessel. This one incident typifies how vulnerable mariners are if they do not carry any personal locating or tracking beacons because there was no way for operators at the port to know that anyone was in danger let alone where they were.

#### ABOUT THE COMPANY

Based in Perth, Western Australia, **Mobilarm** provides marine safety solutions for increased safety of individuals at work, in the form of personal duress alarms, man overboard detection alarms and in-water tracking. Mobilarm has won two Seatrade awards and Lindsay Lyon is recognized as a leading expert on the issues surrounding MOB.

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