



Sirius Signal/photos

Flame Out

An LED solution to pyrotechnic flares might just save your day!

During a recent cruisers' rendezvous, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary (USCGA) arranged clearance for us to have a flare demonstration. We brought our out-of-date flares and lit them off under the supervision of a USCGA volunteer. If you get the opportunity to light a flare, do it—and yes, do it under supervision. Expect a sputtering noise and 1,400-degree slag spitting off in all directions (that's mighty hot). Standing on a dock on a calm day watching the hot slag sizzle into the harbor, I got to thinking about using flares in a real-world situation. If it were dark and rough, hanging onto the boat with one hand while holding a burning flare in the other could be dangerous. It certainly would not be "fun."

Pyrotechnic flares are expensive and have a short shelf life, only 42 months from the date of manufacture. They are based on 13th-century technology, and except for the development of the flare gun (patented in 1859, twenty years before the light bulb) little has changed in 700 years. Carrying three flares as required (on all boats 16 feet and over) gives you no more than nine minutes of illuminated display (individual

flares burn for less than three minutes). Still, as a nighttime emergency signaling device, they were hard to beat—until now.

Enter Sirius Signal. Anthony Covelli and Bob Simmons started Sirius Signal in 2014. Covelli was an avid boater with a unique company that created advanced LED automotive lighting; Simmons was also an avid boater with 35 years of experience as a USCG Vessel examiner. It was his observation that most vessel inspections failed due to outdated flares. The two joined forces to find a solution.

The resulting product is the Sirius Signal SOS Distress Light, an LED signaling device. It continuously flashes the international distress signal, SOS, with a visible range of 10 miles. Once you have purchased one of these LED distress lights and put it onboard, you'll never have to buy another flare kit for your boat.

We all hope we'll never need to use a flare to call for help. But if you ever do, chances are you probably have a lot of other things to deal with. Maybe it's a medical emergency, or your boat is sinking or on fire or washing ashore—you have too much to do to light and then hang onto three



by Tom Hale

different individual flares for a mere nine minutes of dazzling light, hoping someone notices. Even if you shoot them in the air with a flare gun, they fizzle and die with maddening abruptness. Stick the Sirius in a rod holder or hoist it up in the rigging, set it and forget it while you take care of higher priorities. The Sirius Signal SOS Distress Light shines for more than six hours at required peak intensity and illuminates for over 60 hours of uninterrupted unattended operation.

Having had the opportunity to light off a pyrotechnic flare and experience its real risks and drawbacks (which remain quite fresh on my wrist), the Sirius Signal SOS Distress Light will be on my shopping list this fall at the Annapolis Boat Shows (at this writing, we know it will be at the Weems and Plath booth). You can also shop on the company's website, *siriussignal.com*. There you'll also find mini strobe lights, distress flags and safety whistles.

The SOS Distress Light costs about \$100 (versus \$35 for a four-pack of standard-issue flares that must be replaced every three or so years). It is powered by standard alkaline batteries that will need to be replaced periodically. ↴

Tom Hale led a full career in the marine industry. He and his wife Cristina currently live aboard a trawler and cruise the East Coast.

Expired Flares?

Dispose of your out-of-date flares responsibly. They pose a safety risk and are an environmental pollutant. Dumping them is not an option. Instead, try donating them to your local USCGA (find yours at *cgaux.org*) for use in their training programs. Better yet, suggest that your yacht club or marina host a "Flare Day" once a year, and under USCGA supervision, burn off the old flares. (For that matter, it wouldn't hurt to keep a few in the trunk of your car for road emergencies.)