



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SEATTLE MAN INDICTED FOR REPORTING FALSE DISTRESS CALL TO COAST
GUARD**

Search for Vessel Reported in Distress Cost More than \$50,000

JOHN W. GRAHAM, 37, of Seattle, Washington was indicted late yesterday by a federal grand jury for three counts of making false statements related to phony reports of a vessel in distress. On November 18, 2009, GRAHAM transmitted a signal to the Coast Guard on the International Hailing and Distress Frequency (VHF Marine Band Channel 16), in which he falsely claimed he had heard and was relaying a distress call from a sailing vessel that was taking on water with three people on board south of Friday Harbor, Washington. The U.S. Coast Guard scrambled two choppers and a boat to search for the vessel. The alleged vessel in distress was never found and the report was determined to be a hoax. GRAHAM is summoned for arraignment on May 26, 2011, for two counts of making false statements and one count of making a false distress message and causing an attempt to save lives.

According to the indictment, after alleging he had heard the distress call via Marine Band Radio, GRAHAM followed up with a cell phone call to the Coast Guard. He reaffirmed that he had heard a distress call from a sailing vessel with three people on board, taking on water south of Friday Harbor, Washington. The Coast Guard scrambled two helicopters based at Port Angeles, Washington, to search for the vessel in distress. One of the helicopters was diverted from other duties. In all, the air and marine search lasted over six hours and cost about \$54,000. The third count in the indictment relates to the information GRAHAM provided when interviewed by Coast Guard Investigative Service Agents that same day. GRAHAM claimed he had overheard the distress call while working on a friend's sailboat in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle.

"Hoaxes are a tremendous burden on resources and a waste of taxpayers' dollars. It is costly in many ways as lives can be lost when the Coast Guard is responding to the report of a false distress. Deploying our resources to a false distress can prohibit the Coast Guard from a timely response to a genuine emergency," said Rear Adm. Gary T. Blore, Commander of the Thirteenth Coast Guard District.

Making false statements is punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Making a false distress message is punishable by up to six years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and all the costs incurred by the responding agency -- in this case the U.S. Coast Guard.

The charges contained in the indictment are only allegations. A person is presumed innocent unless and until he or she is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

The case is being investigated by the U.S. Coast Guard. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jim Oesterle.

For additional information please contact Emily Langlie, Public Affairs Officer for the United States Attorney's Office, at (206) 553-4110 or Emily.Langlie@USDOJ.Gov.