

GMDSS TASK FORCE PRESS RELEASE

ATTENTION – ALL VESSELS USING VHF-DSC RADIOS

Digital Selective Calling (DSC) Radios Must Have an MMSI Number to Activate the Special Alerting Feature. The GMDSS Task Force is concerned that many users of the new VHF-DSC radios have neglected to register for the unique **Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI)** required not only to identify the vessel but also to enable the special **Distress Alerting Capability** of the DSC radio. The **MMSI registration** greatly assists the Coast Guard in responding to an alert since it contains a description of the vessel and contact numbers of interested parties. MMSI numbers are issued by the FCC if the vessel requires a Station License, otherwise they can be obtained at no cost from BOATUS (www.boatus.com/mmsi), Sea Tow (www.seatow.com/mmsi), or the U.S. Power Squadrons (www.usps.org/php/mmsi).

Once the MMSI is assigned, it must be entered into the radio. The MMSI functions as a "telephone number," so in order to take advantage of the DSC advanced features, the assigned MMSI must be in the radio's memory. In addition to the distress alerting capability, the radio will then have the ability to make routine calls to other DSC radios by entering the other radio's MMSI and touching a button. Once the two radios have connected, they automatically switch to a communication channel so that the conversation can take place. This is all done without having to broadcast on channel 16. An excellent tutorial on the use of DSC radios can be found on the BOATUS Foundation website at www.boatus.com/foundation/dsc/player.htm.

DSC Radios Can Provide Precise Location. The Task Force is further concerned that many users of these DSC radios have failed to connect them to a **GPS** electronic navigation receiver so that their precise location is automatically transmitted along with the DSC Distress Alerting Signal. Statistics show that many mariners in distress are unable to provide a precise location when radioing for help or report a vague general position which delays rescue services in arriving at the scene.

Coast Guard's Rescue 21 Project is Upgrading Coastal Network for DSC Reception. The Coast Guard has nearly completed an extensive project to fill gaps in its VHF coastal coverage and upgrade the system for DSC operation. **Rescue 21** is already operational on most Sectors of the Continental U.S. coast and is being extended to the Great Lakes, the Western Rivers, the overseas islands, and portions of Alaska.

Coast Guard Recommends VHF-DSC Radios for All Mariners. The Coast Guard recommends that mariners use VHF-DSC as the system of choice for marine safety. While use of cell phones is acceptable if VHF is not available, there is a risk of being out of coverage and other nearby mariners who could help will not hear the call. The Task Force is on record that all vessels going three miles offshore should carry a VHF-DSC radio or if exceeding VHF range (20-30 miles) should carry a satellite activated **Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB)** or a **Personal Locater Beacon (PLB)**.

The **Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) Task Force** was created by the Coast Guard to assist the private sector in implementing this new global radio safety system. The GMDSS Task Force is sponsored by the **Radio Technical Commission for Maritime Services (RTCM)** under contract to the U.S. Coast Guard. This safety alert is directed primarily to organizations and media which cater to **Recreational Vessels** and small **Commercial Vessels**. Wide dissemination is urged to ensure that mariners are prepared to take full advantage of this new safety service. Additional information from the Task Force is available by email at gmdss@comcast.net or on our website www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=MaritimeTelecomms (click on GMDSS, then GMDSS Task Force). Information from RTCM is available by email at info@rtcm.org, or at the RTCM Website at www.rtcn.org.