

NATIONAL GMDSS IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE

Newsletter and Summary Record of 14 October 2005 Meeting

1. This summary record is provided for information and will be posted on the Task Force portion of the Coast Guard web site at www.navcen.uscg.gov/marcomms/ (click GMDSS, then GMDSS Task Force). The summary record is also distributed to all Task Force members to serve as a Newsletter summarizing GMDSS developments.

The GMDSS Task Force met in Naples, Florida on 14 October 2005 during the NMEA Annual Meeting. The documents listed below were distributed and copies are available on request.

Summary record of Task Force meeting of 11 August 2005
NASBLA Model Act re EPIRBs and VHF for all vessels offshore

2. The Summary Record of the 11 August Task Force meeting was approved. A copy of the Summary Record is posted on the website.

3. **The Coast Guard Reports:**

a. Status of Coast Guard Funding to Support the GMDSS Task Force.

Captain Ritter opened his remarks with a very complimentary review of the Task Force activity since its inception in 1994. The membership has grown steadily and now stands in excess of 1500. The Task Force has initiated several regulatory actions which have been successfully concluded. One of the Task Force's major accomplishments has been to provide valuable information to the private sector, particularly to those who are not able to monitor the Federal Register. The GMDSS information has been augmented with updates on other new marine electronics requirements such as Automatic Identification Systems (AIS), Ship Security and Safety Systems (SSAS), Voyage Data Recorders (VDR), and Long Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT).

Unfortunately, continued Coast Guard funding to support the Task Force activity has not survived the realignment of available funds undertaken in the wake of the heavy operational commitments to hurricanes KATRINA and RITA. At this point further efforts to secure the funding are doubtful at best. The Coast Guard strongly supports the Task Force program and will encourage alternate arrangements to continue its work. **(NOTE- See 'New Business' at the end of this report for the latest continuity proposal).**

b. Upgrade of the VHF Coastal Network to DSC for Sea Area A1.

Captain Ritter confirmed that Initial Operating Capability (IOC) had been achieved at Atlantic City NJ and Eastern Shore MD as reported at the last meeting. He also confirmed the next stations on the schedule as St. Petersburg FL, Mobile AL, Seattle WA and Port Angeles WA but noted that delays should be expected at Mobile AL due to storm damage. He also reported that Hurricane KATRINA provided a unique opportunity to

test the Disaster Recovery Unit which proved very effective in restoring VHF communications services in Grand Isle LA shortly after the hurricane using a satellite backhaul initially.

c. Upgrade of MF Coastal Network to DSC for Sea Area A2. Captain Ritter noted that the necessary engineering upgrades had been ordered for the MF stations on the Gulf Coast and three west coast stations.

d. Upgrade of Existing HF-DSC Stations. Captain Ritter reported that an automated response to HF-DSC test calls was under development but funding was not yet available for implementation. Similarly, the Coast Guard program to replace HF Transmitters was still unfunded.

e. Current Status of Automatic Identification Systems (AIS). Lee Luft reported that the specifications for Class B AIS equipment are in the final stage of approval and that equipment could be coming into the marketplace in less than a year. He also noted that the specifications for Coast Guard Monitoring Stations ashore had been completed and might also be made available for sensitive non-government stations ashore.

Captain Randy Helland, visiting from the Ninth Coast Guard District in Cleveland, noted some highlights of his observations regarding AIS implementation on the Great Lakes:

The Canadian Seaway uses private contractors to monitor vessel operations. Canadian and U.S. officials expect AIS monitoring to be operational by 2007. It has been noted that many ship's AIS equipment has not been properly set up. Pilots have an AIS set up advisory role to play in entering pier numbers etc. AIS has been a valuable asset in the Sault Ste. Marie Sector which includes the marine traffic control operations on the St. Marys River.

Subsequent to the meeting, The Coast Guard released a notice in the Federal Register on 31 October 2005 expanding Vessel requirements for Notices of Arrival and Departure, and Carriage of Automatic Identification System (AIS). The notice expands the vessels required to carry AIS to include all commercial self-propelled vessels 65 feet or greater (including fishing vessels), towing vessels 26 feet or greater and 600 or more horsepower, vessels carrying more than 50 passengers for hire (rather than 150), vessels carrying or towing dangerous cargo, certain dredges, and certain high speed craft. The requirement to file Notices of Arrival was expanded to include all foreign commercial vessels regardless of tonnage, more U.S. commercial vessels, and all U.S. commercial vessels arriving from a foreign port. In addition, all vessels required to submit Notices of Arrival must also submit Notices of Departure and electronic submission of these notices to the National Vessel Movement Center is mandated.

f. Coast Guard Requirements for Shipboard Security Plans. There was no briefing available on this subject but Ralph Sponar reported that based on his contacts with ships, the requirements are vague and not well understood In many cases a

Shipboard Security Plan has been started by a private security company but not implemented fully by shipboard personnel. A briefing by the Coast Guard will be requested for the next meeting.

4. The FCC Reports: Due to some last minute problem of clearance from FCC headquarters, no representatives were able to attend the meeting. The following comments on status of pending regulatory issues are drawn from briefing materials intended for use at the meeting:

a. Status of Part 80 Continuing Rule Making Proceedings. The following proposals have been opened for comment but not yet finalized:

- Use of IEC and ITU DSC standards in lieu of the RTCM SC-101 standard
- Use of Inmarsat SES in lieu of SSB radios for vessels over 100 miles offshore
- Reserve Power Supply for small passenger vessels less than 100 tons
- Extension of FCC Licenses to the lifetime of the holder
- Should Rules be adopted to certify and regulate SSAS equipment
- Specify Spectrum for maritime AIS in the U.S.
- Whether to permit maritime Public Coast Stations to provide land mobile service

b. Vessels which require a Ship Radio Station License:

- Vessels which carry more than six passengers for hire
- Vessels operating MF or HF Radios
- Vessels which sail to foreign ports
- Vessels larger than 300 gross tons

c. GMDSS Waivers for Fishing Vessels. The FCC notes for this session included an item on GMDSS outfitting for fishing vessels over 300 tons. In response to requests, the FCC plans to grant a one time voyage waiver from GMDSS outfitting providing the applicant has a Purchase Order for the equipment and a date for installation after the voyage.

d. Carryover Issue: Can Recreational Vessels keep existing no-fee MMSI when applying for a Station License? This issue has been raised by vessels having a BOATUS issued MMSI but desiring to get an FCC Station License in compliance with the Rule that requires the Station License for international voyages. Ghassan Khalek acknowledged that the Universal Licensing System (ULS) would not accept an existing MMSI not issued by the FCC and insisted on assigning a new MMSI. He explained the very complicated system and the cost to reprogram the system. The proponents of the change pointed out that the current system was wasteful of MMSI numbers and caused additional expense to the boat owner to have the MMSI number changed in the equipment. Since the FCC apparently lacks the funding to implement this change, the Task Force decided to petition the FCC to make the appropriate changes. (Note – This carry-over issue was reported after the last meeting but is reprinted here since the action has not been completed).

5. The GMDSS Modernization Initiative. RADM Ed Gilbert provided a status report on the Task Force's new initiative concerning GMDSS modernization. The Task Force approved most of the report by the ad hoc group at its August meeting. The following items were approved for further recommendation to the regulatory authorities:

a. VHF-DSC. The Task Force recommends that Sea Area A1 be declared operational when VHF-DSC watch ashore has been activated throughout major sections of the U.S. coast.

b. Maritime Safety Information (MSI). The Task Force recommends that the government not require MSI broadcast services for new systems that are to be authorized to provide emergency communications services. Instead, mandatory vessels can be required to carry appropriate existing MSI broadcast receivers even if they have been permitted to substitute a new safety communications system. Satisfaction of requirements should rest with the ship operator, not with the service provider. The Task Force notes and supports ongoing efforts directed toward developing readily accessible web sites which contain all current MSI warnings.

c. New Satellite Services. The Task Force continues to recommend that new satellite systems be accepted for GMDSS service provided they meet a GMDSS functional requirement. If IMO approval is not forthcoming, the U.S. should accept such systems as equivalent for U.S. flag SOLAS vessels and for non-SOLAS mandatory vessels.

d. MF/HF-DSC Public Correspondence. Since these services are part of the GMDSS but are no longer available, the Task Force recommends alternative satellite systems, which can and do provide this service, be accepted for mandatory U.S. vessels.

e. Replacement of Search and Rescue Transponders (SARTS). There is little evidence that SARTs are playing a major role in Search and Rescue locating. The Task Force recommends that alternative solutions such as Class B AIS equipment be investigated as a replacement. The Task Force is pleased to note the U.S. plans to submit a paper to an upcoming IMO meeting recommending Class B AIS as a suitable substitute for SARTs. The Task Force recommends continued consideration of this and other possible substitute systems such as a hand held satellite radio with an embedded GPS receiver.

f. Require all Vessels going 1 mile offshore to carry VHF Radios or EPIRBs. The Task Force supports the NASBLA initiative (see pp 10b below) but would prefer a uniform national law. The huge number of unregulated private vessels in the U.S. and the new security demands for maritime domain awareness strongly support this action. The Task Force recommends that the Coast Guard and FCC seek legislative authority to translate this initiative into a uniform national requirement.

6. **The RTCM Report:** RTCM President Bob Markle was unable to attend the meeting but reminds members that the 2006 RTCM Assembly will be in Newport Beach, California May 7-12. Other items include the following:

a. **Standards for Above Deck Antennas.** The RTCM Board agreed that this would be a worthwhile effort for study by a new Special Committee but the issue was tabled in view of the need to draft the Terms of Reference and locate a suitable Chairman for the Committee. The issue is also one of great complexity.

b. **VHF Data Interface Standards.** The RTCM Board approved this new study effort in principle but it was also tabled pending a draft Terms of Reference and Chairman.

7. **The Report of the GMDSS Service Agents & Manufacturers Group:** Ralph Sponar noted with respect to AIS installations that numerous problems have been encountered with 'Pilot Plugs' intended for the input of special information by the pilots. He further noted a number of installation problems related to the gyro converters which can result in no heading information and in some cases failure of the auto pilot.

8. **The Report of the GMDSS Training Group:** The following training initiatives are currently active:

a. **Ad hoc Group Review of Question Pools and FCC Regulations.** The Group is making good progress but has not yet reported its recommendations.

b. **Ad hoc Group to review GMDSS Maintainer Qualification.** This Group has not been active in the last few months due to limited interest in the issue.

c. **New U. S. Power Squadrons GMDSS Handbook.** The Task Force has endorsed a new handbook entitled THE BOATOWNERS GUIDE TO GMDSS AND MARINE RADIO. The Handbook comes with an interactive CD-ROM guide to using a digital VHF Marine Radio. Those desiring to order a copy should call the McGraw-Hill Customer Service Dept. at 1-800-262-4729. Bookstores should call 1-800-722-4726.

d. **New Issue regarding qualification for FCC License on Completion of GMDSS Training Course.** The Task Force has been notified by the Coast Guard's National Maritime Center of a potential problem with qualification for the FCC License on completion of a GMDSS Training Course. The COLEM processing the examination results declined to accept the completed exams without further qualification (and a further fee) for the FCC License. This is the first time this issue has been raised and the Task Force plans to follow up and work with the FCC as necessary to resolve the issue.

9. **The Report of the GMDSS Commercial Vessel Group:** There were no new issues relating to the Commercial Vessel Group raised at the meeting.

10. The Recreational Vessel Group Report:

a. DSC Tutorial: The Task Force has been following the development of a DSC tutorial by the BOAT U.S. Foundation under a Coast Guard grant. The program is being developed by Chuck Husick who reports that it is essentially complete but conversion to web site and CD format is not yet complete.

b. NASBLA Draft Model Act on VHF and/or EPIRBs for all Vessels Going More than 1 Mile Offshore: The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) has drafted a Model Act which they will recommend to all coastal states. The model Act requires that all vessels going more than a mile offshore must carry a VHF Radio or an EPIRB. In the final version of the Model Act, a Marine Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) is an acceptable substitute for an EPIRB.

c. BOATUS MMSI Report: BOATUS has assigned MMSI numbers to 25,849 boats to date. 49 boat owners have dropped their FCC Station Licenses and re-registered with BOATUS in order to keep their MMSI number and furnish the additional descriptive data not previously collected by the FCC.

d. Radio Checks on VHF-DSC. The FCC has approved the use of a universal MMSI by TowBoatUS and Sea Tow boats which could be used for radio checks on VHF-DSC. If implemented by those companies, shift to an alternative channel other than 16 for the reply would be necessary.

11. The Next Meeting of the GMDSS Task Force: The Task Force agreed to meet next in the Washington area on Thursday morning 5 January 2006 at the RTCM Headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. The follow on meeting will be at the Hyatt Regency in Newport Beach, California on Thursday 11 May 2006 during the RTCM Annual Assembly.

12. New Business – Future support for the GMDSS Task Force. Following the meeting, there have been discussions with interested parties in finding a formula for continuing the Task Force program. The Radio Technical Commission for Maritime Services (RTCM) has offered its services as a sponsor and would like to continue to hold a Task Force meeting during its Annual Assembly in May and host the two Washington meetings the Task Force typically holds each year. Similar discussions have been opened with the National Marine Electronics Association (NMEA) which could lead to continuing to hold a Task Force meeting during the NMEA annual meeting in October. Neither organization is in a position to underwrite Task Force expenses except for covering the cost of participation in their respective meetings but the Task Force Director has offered to continue to direct the program on a less intensive basis without compensation. There are, of course, many unresolved issues but it appears that the Task Force program can be continued, at least on an interim basis. The Task Force appreciates the many expressions of support from various quarters.

GMDSS TASK FORCE CONTINUING WORK LIST

14 October 2005

1. Monitor FCC continuing action to update GMDSS Rules (TF)
2. Recommend actions to reduce false alerts in GMDSS systems (TF)
3. Monitor Coast Guard Port State GMDSS inspection program (TF)
4. Monitor MSI broadcasting programs for compliance with GMDSS Standards (TF)
5. Review GMDSS Internet Web Sites and update Task Force portion of USCG site (TF)
6. Support SOLAS Working Group planning for IMO COMSAR meetings (TF)
7. Disseminate GMDSS Information Bulletins and IMO GMDSS Documents (TF)
8. Advocate Canadian coordination to extend GMDSS services to the Great Lakes (TF)
9. Review GMDSS concepts and make modernization recommendations (TF)
10. Recommend Coastal states require VHF or EPIRBs for all vessels offshore (TF)
11. Petition the FCC to let R/Vs keep existing MMSI when applying for Station Lic. (TF)
12. Encourage AMVER & VOS participation to supplement GMDSS (CV)
13. Publicize availability of NAVTEX receivers without printers for all vessels (CV)
14. Advocate intership calling on HF GMDSS channels (CV)
15. Encourage Mfgs. to upgrade GMDSS explanations in equipment manuals (SA)
16. Recommend to FCC clarifications to their List of Approved GMDSS Equipment (SA)
17. Monitor guidelines for GMDSS equipment maint. and maintainer standards (SA)
18. Recommend proper interconnection of GPS receivers with DSC Radios (SA)
19. Recommend training programs for non-mandatory users of GMDSS systems (RV)
20. Encourage GMDSS handbooks and Internet and video training aids (RV)
21. Recommend Class 'D' VHF-DSC as superior to RTCM SC-101 format (RV)

Key to cognizant groups: (TF) Task Force
 (TR) Training Task Group
 (CV) Commercial Vessel Task Group
 (SA) Service Agents and Manufacturers Task Group
 (RV) Recreational Vessel Task Group

Please refer questions and proposals to Captain Jack Fuechsel at 703-527-0484 or gmdss@comcast.net (note change in phone and further change to email beyond that reported in the prior Newsletter). If you have an Internet server with spam filters, please authorize receipt of messages from gmdss@comcast.net.

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