

NATIONAL GMDSS IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE

Newsletter and Summary Record of January 9, 2008 Meeting

The Summary Record. 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 and other issues in marine telecommunications.

The GMDSS Task Force met at the RTCM Headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. The documents listed below were distributed:

IMO Guidelines on Annual Testing of AIS
Draft Program for ad hoc group on Annual GMDSS Inspections
Gilbert Paper – Small Vessel Telecommunications Programs
Coast Guard Press Release on 406 MHz Direction Finding
Rescue 21 Press Release on Activation of Sector New York

1. **Summary Record of October 19, 2007 Meeting:** The Summary Record of the October 19, 2007 meeting which had been distributed earlier, was noted without correction.

2. **The Coast Guard Reports:**

a. Status of MF-DSC Coastal Network Upgrade to DSC for Sea Area A2.

Russ Levin explained that the study of life cycle costs for the upgrade had been completed and that the Commandant would be briefed in the near future. Further coverage validation is needed and will be conducted with the assistance of Coast Guard vessels. It is not possible to predict the final decision at this time but it could range from full coastal coverage to coverage in selected areas or even discontinuing coastal watch on the 2 MHz band.

b. Status Report on Rescue 21 VHF–DSC for Sea Area A1.

LCDR Brian Anderson of the Rescue 21 Program, provided an update briefing noting that Sector New York was ready for activation and would be followed by Sector Jacksonville, Florida at the end of January, Sector Hampton Roads, Virginia toward the end of February, and Sector Baltimore, Maryland somewhat later. The VHF-DSC automated test call facility is operational in all sectors where the DSC upgrade has been activated. In response to a question, it was suggested that the Rescue 21 Program or the Task Force publish a list of active Coast Guard Sector MMSI numbers as a convenience to those users who wish to call their local station or use the test call facility.

c. IMO Initiative for Long Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT).

Bill Cairns provided a status report on the implementation plans for the LRIT with the following highlights:

1. The program is a cooperative effort rather than a pure surveillance mission and data is to be available for security, safety, and environmental protection purposes. LRIT applies to SOLAS class ships and will utilize automatic position reporting via any system which can meet the stated requirements for reports containing only identification, time and position.

2. Reports are to be sent by secure means rather than open broadcast at 6 hour intervals and can be either automatically transmitted or polled from shore.

3. The International Mobile Satellite Organization (IMSO) has been designated as the coordinator for LRIT. The U.S. will build and operate the International Data Exchange (IDE) on an interim basis to ensure that the system will be fully operational by the planned 31 December 2008 activation date.

4. National and Regional/Cooperative Data Centers are under development by nations or groups of nations. These data centers will feed LRIT information through the IDE to SOLAS Country governments entitled to that information. Countries not participating in a national, cooperative, or regional data center are required by SOLAS to send their reports to an International Data Center (IDC). However, at the last Maritime Safety Committee meeting, no delegation committed to using the IDC. A decision will likely be made at the May 2008 Committee meeting concerning the need for an IDC. The US had offered that it would be willing to build and operate an interim IDC, but the offer was not accepted at MSC. There remain numerous unresolved issues such as the cost and billing model (e.g. how costs are apportioned to Contracting Governments). Ships operating solely in Sea Area A1 are exempt since their AIS broadcasts will fulfill the requirement.

5. The U.S. published a Notice of Proposed Rule Making on LRIT on which comments were due 2 January 2008. This Rule would implement domestically the SOLAS regulation.

d. ITU Identifies a New Port Security Communications Requirement. Russ Levin noted that the ITU WARC meeting in the fall of 2007 identified a new requirement for port security communications which might require new technology and additional spectrum. A specific need identified was improved alerting of ships in port to changing security conditions. This will be studied by administrations but could include enhanced broadcast services such as AIS text messages, but these have a limited capacity and no alerting capability. Another candidate would be a Navtex like service with more capacity. A VHF broadcast could also be employed but a printer would be needed if record format is required.

e. Coast Guard 406 MHz Direction Finding Program. Lcdr Kathy Niles reported on the highly successful program of direction finding on the EPIRB 406 MHz alerting signal. The following are highlights:

1. Detection by aircraft with the new DF is achieving excellent ranges out to 100 miles or more depending on altitude, significantly better than DF bearings on the 121.5 MHz homer on the EPIRBs.

2. All Coast Guard C-130 aircraft are being equipped with the new DF capability as are the falcon jets, the new Deepwater surveillance aircraft and the helicopters. It will take until 2010-2012 to get all aircraft equipped.

3. The Rescue 21 coastal VHF towers are also being evaluated for the 406 MHz DF capability as are cruising cutters. Portable DFs with this capability are also being evaluated, partly due to the rapidly expanding deployment of Personal Locator Beacons (PLB) for both maritime and land use.

f. Sectors Activating Rescue 21 are Experiencing Increased False Alerts. Kathy Niles also reported on a recent letter from the 5th District noting an increase in false alerts in the Hampton Roads coverage area and local initiatives to deal with the problem. This seems to validate the Task Force's concern that many recreational boats with DSC capable VHF radios were not bothering to register for MMSI numbers and connect GPS or Loran receivers for automatic position information. It also suggests that boats which send false alerts may have entered something other than an MMSI number without which the DSC radio will not send an alert. Task Force members offered a number of suggestions for dealing with the problem including the following:

1. Undertake a local public relations campaign including marinas, yacht clubs, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, the Power Squadrons, Tow Boat US, and Sea Tow using the recent Coast Guard Safety Alert emphasizing the need to register for MMSIs and connect navigation receivers.

2. Alert the Rescue 21 Program to anticipate these false alerts as they Activate new Sectors for VHF-DSC and include these suggestions as part of their operator training program. Also alert the Office of Boating Safety for their assistance in a broader public relations campaign.

3. Recommend that boat operators utilize the many training aids which the Task Force has encouraged including the DSC Tutorial on the BOAT US Foundation website, several handbooks on VHF-DSC and an excellent video "Taking the Search Out of Search and Rescue" available in both VCR and DVD format.

g. Coast Guard HF Weather Broadcast Program to Continue. Russ Levin noted that the recent public inquiry on the need to continue HF Weather broadcasts had received over 1000 responses, all in favor of retaining the program. Since the inquiry revealed no suitable alternatives, it is assumed that HF weather broadcasting will continue and that HF transmitters will be replaced as funding allows.

3. The FCC Reports: Ghassan Khalek reported for the FCC, the following are highlights of his report:

a. Pending FCC Rulemaking Issues. At the time of the meeting there had been no new Reports or Notices of Further Rulemaking on Part 80 but on 25 January, the Federal Register published a long awaited update to WT Docket 00-48; FCC 06-129 adopted 29 August 2006. The update contained numerous clarifications of minor issues and the following are some of the significant decisions:

- 1.) Requires DSC to comply with international specifications
- 2.) Accepts the Inmarsat Fleet 77 terminal as acceptable for GMDSS
- 3.) Mandates Reserve Power for additional classes of small passenger vessels
- 4.) Extends the term of all Operator Licenses to life of the holder
- 5.) Relaxes the Rules so COLE managers have flexibility in administering exams
- 6.) Adopts Rules to regulate SSAS Beacons operating with Cospas-Sarsat
- 7.) Permits programming of marine radio channels by remote control
- 8.) Removes the authority for RTCM SC-101 DSC radios but the FCC will accept Applications for new versions for 4 years and manufacturers may continue To market existing versions for 3 years

The new Rules take effect 90 days from the publication date. Interested parties may view the update in its entirety at:
<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/olan20081800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/E8-903.htm>

b. Pending approval of AIS Class B Units. The Task Force was extremely disappointed to learn that there had been no progress since the meeting in October at which time an expedited action was awaiting clearance by the Commissioners. Subsequent to the meeting, several emails were received urging that the Task Force intervene with a message direct to each Commissioner urging that the Class B units be promptly approved. This was done and the text of the message sent is as follows:

“Re: WT Docket No. 04-344, Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making Concerning Amendment of the Commission's Rules Regarding Maritime Automatic Identification Systems (AIS); Item on Circulation.

Dear FCC Commissioners -

I am the Director of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) Task Force. I am writing to you in frustration over the continuing delays in granting approval for the Maritime Class B AIS units which is one subject of the above-referenced Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making. The AIS units on ships are especially valuable to ship operators for safety of navigation and to the Coast Guard for monitoring vessel activity for both safety and security purposes. There is no known downside to approving this device which is already being sold abroad by our competitors. Failure to act promptly is both hurting U.S. manufacturers of the device who are anxious to market their products and delaying the deployment of the devices to enhance marine safety and security.

The U.S. Coast Guard has already given its approval for the Class B AIS units several months ago. Class A AIS units are mandated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and have been fitted on large ocean going ships for some time now. The Class B counterpart is a

less expensive version designed primarily for voluntary use on recreational vessels as well as expected mandatory use on certain small commercial vessels. There is a much larger market for Class B units than for Class A units in this country.

I am writing at this time to convey to you the substantial frustration expressed at a recent meeting of the U.S. GMDSS Task Force. The members present are especially anxious to have this impasse resolved. I am the Director of the Task Force which is sponsored by the Coast Guard and which has over 1700 members. We have been active for several years in assisting in the implementation of the GMDSS and related maritime safety systems in the private sector.

On behalf of the GMDSS Task Force, I urge you to vote on this item being circulated in order to provide our nation the opportunity for enhanced maritime safety and security.

Sincerely,

Captain Jack Fuechsel, USCG, (Ret.)
Director, GMDSS Task Force
703-527-0484"

c. FCC Response to Task Force Petition and Recommendations on MMSI Policy. The substance of the Task Force Petition was put out for public comment for which the closing date was shortly following our October meeting. 591 Comments were received, all supporting the Task Force position. A Report can be expected but the FCC has not yet announced their decision on the Task Force recommendations on MMSI Policy.

4. The RTCM Report: RTCM President Bob Markle reported on several issues as follows:

a. Activity of RTCM SC 101/110 on Incorporating GPS in VHF Handhelds. The handheld envisioned might be required of a few vessels such as small passenger vessels without reserve power but would otherwise be used by a largely voluntary group of vessels. The committee has decided that a new class of VHF radio is needed to identify a portable with DSC and incorporating a GPS receiver. A paper will go to ITU Working Party 5b making the proposal.

b. Activity of RTCM SC-121 on Automatic Identification Systems. This committee is reviewing expanded use of the AIS record messaging system for possible applications such as broadcasting of weather and other security and environmental information.

c. Activity of RTCM SC-127 on eLoran. E Loran is an enhanced Loran relying on precise timing and no longer needing to operate in 'chains'. It is being strongly advocated in Europe and is the system of choice to provide back up for GPS. The Committee has decided that two new standards are needed, one to define the eLoran signal in space and another to set a standard for an eLoran receiver.

d. Other RTCM Announcements of Interest. The section of the RTCM website, www.rtc.org, dealing with required equipment to comply with SOLAS regulations for Navigation and Radio Safety equipment has recently been updated. In addition, a section had been added dealing with LRIT requirements. The 2008 RTCM Assembly will be at the Catamaran Hotel in San Diego, California May 4-10, 2008. The Commanders of Coast Guard Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Units will also be meeting in San Diego during the Assembly.

5. GMDSS Modernization Initiative. Ed Gilbert reported as follows:

a. New Paper on Small Vessel Telecommunications Requirements. Admiral Gilbert introduced a new paper which he had presented to the RTCM Board of Directors. Since many of the issues raised are also of interest to the Task Force, copies were distributed for comment. The paper was tabled until the next meeting noting that in the interim, the RTCM Board of Directors will have considered what action, if any, they elect to take.

b. Developments in E Navigation. Bill Cairns reported on this new initiative which the Task Force is following. "E Navigation" encompasses a variety of integrated digital applications including electronic chart displays and an enhanced Loran service termed eLoran. The International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) is developing a 'vision' for E Navigation and two IMO Subcommittees (Radionavigation and Communications, Search & Rescue) have established work programs including a Correspondence Group to work between sessions. The London based Nautical Institute is developing their view of user requirements.

6. Reports and Issues: the GMDSS Commercial Vessel Group: The new ad hoc group to review mandatory radio requirements for small fishing vessels has not met pending a review of the joint Coast Guard/NOAA NMFS report due to Congress in the next few months. The draft issue paper on the subject was updated for this meeting but only distributed to those present. It is available to others on request. Since the scope of the mandated government report to Congress embraces many of the issues proposed for Task Force review, it was decided to table the issue pending availability of the content of their report to Congress.

7. Reports and Issues: the GMDSS Service Agents & Manufacturers Group: Ralph Sponar moderated the discussion on the new ad hoc group established to review policy and procedures related to the annual GMDSS inspection. An outline of the proposed effort was distributed at the meeting and emailed to prospective members of the group. Others are welcome to copies on request and invited to join the group if interested. Work will be conducted by email. One of the primary objectives was to update the forms used for the annual inspection since the FCC forms are out of date. The American Bureau of Shipping (ABS) has offered to let their forms be used for this purpose which is attractive since they are kept up to date and are available on line (see www.eagle.org). Other tentative issues to be reviewed include the following:

- a. Whether to include annual inspections of AIS, SSAS, and VDR/SVDR?
- b. Whether to include inspections of non-SOLAS mandatory vessels?
- c. Whether to review minimum qualification for inspectors?
- d. Whether copies of the inspection report should be kept by government?
- e. Whether any changes to the FCC Rules are needed regarding inspections?

8. Reports and Issues: The Recreational Vessel Group Report. Elaine Dickinson of BOAT US has loyally served as leader of this group for a number of years but her public relations duties have expanded to require her full time attention. The Task Force thanks her for her many contributions over the years. She will be replaced by Chuck Husick, also of BOAT US but well known to the Task Force as author of the DSC Tutorial as well as numerous marine electronics columns in boating magazines. He operates his own boat and often reports on safety radio services.

One issue of interest to this group relates to a new ITU rule adopted last fall which would relieve voluntary vessels of the need to hold a Radio Station License when visiting a neighboring country provided the two countries entered into a bilateral agreement to this effect. It had been hoped that this could resolve a current impasse wherein the FCC Rules require a Station License if going to foreign ports even though no one enforces the requirement. A preliminary review has determined that the FCC can't waive that Rule without changing the basic law since its authority is embedded in the Communications Act of 1934. This is often a problem since many regulations which should have been in the Rules were put into the Act and the FCC has been very reluctant to request changes to their Act.

9. Reports and Issues: the GMDSS Training Group: The only item of interest to this group is to note that the Coast Guard's National Maritime Center (NMC) which administers most mariner training programs has moved its office from Arlington, Virginia to Martinsburg, West Virginia with new telephone numbers.

10. The Next Meeting of the GMDSS Task Force: The Task Force agreed to meet next in San Diego, California on 8 May 2008 during the Annual Meeting of the RTCM.

GMDSS TASK FORCE CONTINUING WORK LIST

9 January 2008

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. Advocate Canadian coordination to extend GMDSS services to the Great Lakes (TF)
8. Review GMDSS concepts and make modernization recommendations (TF)
9. Advocate regulatory action to require VHF or EPIRBs for all vessels offshore (TF)
10. Advocate overhaul of FCC policy and practice on MMSI assignments (TF)
11. Monitor non-GMDSS systems: AIS, LRIT, SSAS, VDR, VMS, & E-Navigation (TF)

12. Recommend updates for Coast Guard NVIC on GMDSS Requirements (TF)
13. Advocate intership calling on HF GMDSS channels (CV)
14. Review Safety Radio and VMS Requirements for Small Fishing Vessels (CV)
15. Recommend training programs for non-mandatory users of GMDSS systems (RV)
16. Encourage GMDSS handbooks and Internet and video training aids (RV)
17. Recommend Class 'D' VHF-DSC as superior to RTCM SC-101 format (RV)
18. Advocate FCC enable R/Vs keep existing MMSI when applying for Station Lic. (RV)
19. Encourage Mfgs. to upgrade GMDSS explanations in equipment manuals (SA)
20. Monitor guidelines for GMDSS equipment maintenance & maintainer standards (SA)
21. Recommend proper interconnection of GPS receivers with DSC Radios (SA)
22. Recommend to FCC updating of forms for annual GMDSS inspections (SA)
23. Maintain GMDSS Question Pools for FCC and Coast Guard Examinations (TR)

Key to cognizant groups:

- (TF) Task Force
- (CV) Commercial Vessel Task Group
- (RV) Recreational Vessel Task Group
- (SA) Service Agents and Manufacturers Task Group
- (TR) Training Task Group

Attachment: Draft Agenda for Task Force Meeting 8 May 2008 in San Diego.

Please refer questions and proposals to Captain Jack Fuechsel at 703-527-0484 or gmdss@comcast.net If you have an Internet server with spam filters, please authorize receipt of messages from gmdss@comcast.net

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