

NATIONAL GMDSS TASK FORCE

Newsletter and Summary Record of 14 May 2020 Meeting

- The Task Force Meeting.** This Newsletter reports on the recent virtual meeting of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) Task Force sponsored by the U.S. Coast Guard and dedicated to monitoring the success and shortcomings of the GMDSS. The Task Force is also active in current efforts to modernize the GMDSS and monitors related developments in maritime radio and electronic navigation (e-navigation). The Task Force advocates voluntary use of radio safety equipment by all vessels and makes recommendations to government authorities to improve safety at sea regulations.
- Task Force membership.** Membership is open to individuals associated with commercial vessel operations, recreational vessel interests, training institutions, service agents, manufacturers, government authorities and any interested person or organization, and there is no fee for participation. New members are welcome, to join, send your name, organization (if any), email address, and telephone number (optional) to gmdsstf@gmail.com. Members who are unable to attend Task Force meetings are invited to participate by email and to connect with Task Force meetings by conference call. This Newsletter goes out to over 5000 members after each quarterly meeting. The Task Force also maintains a website at: <https://www.navcen.uscg.mil/?pageName=MaritimeTelecomms> (click GMDSS/TF)
- The Summary Record.** This record of the meeting is provided for information and will be posted on the Task Force portion of the Coast Guard web site. Due to the Corona Virus Pandemic, the GMDSS Task Force held a virtual meeting on 14 May 2020 supported by the RTCM on Microsoft Teams Meeting with almost 50 members and guests participating.
- Distribution of Information Papers:** The following Papers of interest were distributed and are available to all on the website: <https://www.joecel.com/GMDSSTaskForce>

Alaska Congressional Delegation Re VHF Outages in Gulf of Alaska – 2/07/20
Stickers applied to EBIRBs and PLBs in UK as reminder to Register – 5/11/20
Cospas-Sarsat Letter on Return Link Service via Galileo – 5/08/20
FCC posting of Task Force GMDSS Inspection Check List – 1/24/20
Comsat Document Announcing new Inmarsat-C monthly Subscription Fee – 5/13/20
News Release on i911 Program to help USCG Access Smartphone Position – 5/07/20
i911 Program Briefing from Coast Guard R&D Center by Sekaran Jambukesan – 5/14/20
NWS Hurricane Center Briefing for Task Force by Chris Landsea – 5/14/20
Seven Updated GMDSS Task Force Information Bulletins for approval – 5/14/20
 Applicability Of The GMDSS To Warships
 Prudent Mariners Utilize Marine Safety Information (MSI) Broadcasts
 Small Commercial Vessels Less Than 300 Tons
 Training And Certification Of GMDSS Radio Operators
 Use Of Cell Phones For Distress Alerting
 Use Of GMDSS Equipment For Non-Safety Communications
 Tonnage Interpretations For GMDSS Application

5. **The Coast Guard Reports:** Pat Gallagher and others reported with the following highlights:

a. Report on the Coast Guard Proposal to Discontinue NAVTEX Service: Pat Gallagher reported previously that the response to the Federal Register Notice was over whelming in favor of keeping NAVTEX as were interventions from other government agencies. A course of action has been proposed but is still under review by higher authorities so no formal decision has yet been reached. If a decision should be made to retain NAVTEX service, it will need to be accompanied by a funding plan to repair current outages and provide for long term maintenance.

b. Results of IMO NCSR Subcommittee in London: Pat Gallagher and others reported that the U.S. position on all issues had been achieved. The primary issues were LED lighting interference and recognition of Iridium as a GMDSS service provider. A U.S. paper will be submitted to the Joint Experts Group on the LED issue, but that meeting will probably be postponed. There were no problems with recognition of Iridium at the NCSR meeting.

c. MMSIs for Diver Radios Not Associated With a Vessel: Joe Hersey reported that the FCC had agreed in principle to allow license-by-rule providers to issue 8MIDXXXXX MMSI blocks to users of VHF handhelds not associated with a specific boat, such as diver radios. BOATUS and USPS were both considering this, noting that software changes might be necessary and a modified MOU needs to be finalized.

d. LED Lighting Update from Chairman of RTCM SC-137: Joe Hersey, the Chair of SC-137, gave an update on progress toward developing a standard to deal with LED lighting interference to VHF maritime radios and Automatic Identification Systems (AIS). The Special Committee will also look into LED interference to MF/HF and L Band systems such as GPS. Field testing is planned for this summer with Coast Guard support. IEC plans to begin working on a new international standard once RTCM has a draft available.

e. Implementation of Return Link Service on EPIRBs: Chris Hoffman and others reported on a recent Cospas-Sarsat document providing details on how countries can sign up for the new Return Link Service (RLS) on the Galileo System that was designed to acknowledge receipt of EPIRB (and other 406 MHz beacons) Distress Alerts thus providing confidence to the end user that their alert had been received. The service was declared operational by the European Commission in January and while there are currently no RLS beacons with type approval, some are expected soon. EPIRBs (and other 406 MHz beacons) with RLS can currently be offered for sale only in about a dozen countries, mainly in Europe. RLS beacons will work globally, but in some places there could be delays in the RLS response back to beacon until the system is fully operational. RLS beacons are not currently approved for sale in the U.S.

f. Briefing on i911 Program, Geolocation of Smart Phones: Sekaran Jambukesan of the Coast Guard Research and Development Center presented a briefing on a new program to enable RCCs to extract a GPS position from a smart phone reporting a Distress. The program was developed by Callyo Co. and offered free of charge to all First Responders. The RCC Controller sends a text to the smart phone asking that they release their position and the phone operator clicks a provided link that sends the position. There is minimal training at the RCC and none at the mariner's end. The system works well with most smart phones built in 2017 or later. The system was tested successfully in the First District and has since been authorized for all Districts.

g. Use of "Stickers" on EPIRBs and PLBs in the UK as a reminder to Register: One of the documents provided is a sample UK use of 'stickers' to be applied by manufacturers of EPIRBs and Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) as a reminder to register the devices. Because we continue to deal with failure to register in the U.S, it was suggested that this program be adopted for use in the U.S. Others suggested that it be expanded to include VHF radios that have the same problem. This agenda item will be carried over to the next meeting.

h. IMO Initiative on GMDSS for Non-SOLAS Vessels: The Task Force has become aware on a new IMO initiative to develop a GMDSS plan for non-SOLAS vessels. Most Administrations have required selected components of the GMDSS for non-SOLAS vessels and this could be an effort to standardize the requirements internationally. There is very little information available on this new issue so it will be carried over to the next meeting.

i. Letter from Alaskan Congressional Delegation on VHF Outages in Gulf of Alaska: The Task Force became aware of this letter to the Coast Guard that has been made available for information. The letter basically complains about numerous and extended VHF service outages in the Gulf of Alaska and expresses concern for maritime safety. Presumably there has been some response from the Coast Guard but no further information was available at this time. This item will be carried over to the next meeting.

k. Briefing on Weather Services by Chris Landsea of the National Hurricane Center: Chris's Power Point presentation is included in the documentation for the Task Force meeting. His presentation covered operations of the Hurricane Center and the products created for mariners. In addition to general forecasts, the Center often does spot forecasts to assist SAR cases, oil spills etc. with drift analysis. One graphic showed vessels underway and those vessels taking action to avoid an approaching hurricane. Ship weather reports are very valuable in compiling forecasts and participation by more observing ships would be quite beneficial.

l. Distribution of Scheduled Broadcast Notice to Mariners by Mobile and Internet Methods: This new Request for Comments was received after the meeting but is summarized here to enable Task Force members to sample the trial being conducted in the fifth District (Virginia, North Carolina and Delaware Bay) and make comments to the Coast Guard:

SUMMARY: The Coast Guard will begin making broadcast notices to mariners containing locally relevant navigation information accessible by mobile devices and the internet. New methods of information delivery will include Rich Site Summary also known as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, email, and other means such as web-based graphic. The Coast Guard

believes the internet and mobile availability will allow greater numbers of mariners to access this information, and to do so in a more-timely, reliable, convenient, and customized manner. Currently, the only way to obtain this information is to tune in to local Coast Guard broadcasts that take place on very high frequency (VHF) marine radio two or more times per day.

Comments must be submitted to the online docket via [https:// www.regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) on or before July 28, 2020 citing Docket No. USCG-2020-0187. For more information see: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-05-29/pdf/2020-11619.pdf>

6. The FCC Reports by Ghassan Khalek and others with the following highlights:

a. New Subscription Fee for Inmarsat-C Terminals Announced: A document from Comsat was received announcing that Inmarsat would be imposing a new monthly recurring subscription charge applicable to all Inmarsat C User Terminals regardless of use, including terminals that had been barred, effective July 2020. This charge appears to be applicable to those who use their terminals solely for receipt of SafetyNET broadcasts. Very little other information is currently available. The FCC and the Coast Guard will review the issue at their next meeting and this issue will be carried over to the next meeting.

b. The American Bureau of Shipping (ABS) has requested FCC approval of Virtual Ship Inspections: The ABS is apparently asking to use photo evidence of required documents such as licenses which could not be renewed due to the pandemic in conducting inspection of U.S. flag vessels overseas. There would be a qualified surveyor on board so no serious obstacle is evident. A possible issue was raised by a questioner that Port State Inspectors in foreign ports sometimes want to see an FCC stamp on documentation.

c. FCC has granted an additional year of waiver to selected Alaskan Fishing Vessels: Ghassan reported that the FCC had extended the waivers for certain Alaskan fishing vessels for an additional year to expire in January 2022 in response to interventions by Alaskan authorities citing curtailed support operations during the pandemic.

d. MMSI's not Registered with ITU MARS for all R/Vs Going Foreign: FCC for a time failed to notify the ITU Maritime Mobile Access and Retrieval System (MARS) database of MMSIs of ship station licenses marked as going on foreign voyages. They have since corrected the problem but are unable to retroactively notify ITU of MMSIs assigned to previously registered licenses. Licensees, however, can resolve the problem prior to making a foreign voyage by simply trivially modifying their ship station license any time or at renewal time, such as by changing "Road" to "Rd" in their address. Modified licenses are notified to the ITU. The FCC indicated there would be no cost to boaters for modifying their licenses.

e. FCC Enforcement of Unauthorized AIS Devices: This item was put on the Agenda because of widespread use of AIS for unauthorized applications such as marking fishing nets. There has been no new activity so this item will be carried over to the next meeting.

f. FCC Rules now Require EPIRBs Sold in U.S. to Have Integral GNSS: There is no action required under this item which is simply a reminder that the FCC required all new EPIRBs sold in the U.S. from January 17, 2020 to have integral GNSS, existing EPIRBs were

grandfathered indefinitely for most vessels. However, all mandatory vessels subject to 47 CFR subparts R, S, and W must carry EPIRBs with integral GNSS from January 17, 2023. It was also noted that IMO introduced new rules for EPIRBs on SOLAS vessels last year, which come into force on July 1, 2022 with additional requirements above those currently required on U.S. vessels.

7. **Reports and Issues, Recreational Vessel Group:** George Hallenbeck reported with the following highlights:

a. Revised GMDSS Information Bulletins for Recreational Vehicles: There are two Bulletins dealing with recreational vehicles, one dealing with GMDSS as a whole and the other addressing R/Vs using VHF only. It is planned to update the Bulletin dealing with GMDSS as a whole and discontinue to one for VHF only. The updated version was not available at the time of the meeting so it will be circulated for comment and the final version will be placed on the web site along with the others that were approved for posting today.

b. Sea Tow Discontinuing Issue of MMSI Numbers. George Hallenbeck reported that Sea Tow had elected to stop issuing MMSI Numbers and the problem of duplicated MMSI assignments made is still not resolved. The USPS remains willing to take over that block and manage its existing MMSI holders once the FCC and Coast Guard grant approval, but is unable to assume responsibility for resolving the duplication problem. The FCC and Coast Guard are coordinating a joint letter to the USPS authorizing them to temporarily but indefinitely continue assigning MMSIs while discussions continue on a revised Memorandum of Understanding. Once that letter is signed, and the USPS remains willing, the FCC and the Coast Guard will coordinate a second letter to the USPS authorizing the transfer of MMSI responsibility to the USPS and absolving the USPS from responsibility for correcting duplications.

c. Coast Guard/DHS Response to Challenge Competition: Marty Jackson provided an update on this prize contest to develop innovative ways to enhance detection of people in the water. Four devices are being tested and the results are expected soon, we will request a further update at our next meeting.

d. Modify Voluntary Inspection Check List to Invite Discussion on MMSI Registration and Connection of GPS. Because the failure to properly register for an MMSI number is greatest among recreational vessels, the Task Force is working with the Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety to hopefully modify the latter's check list for voluntary inspections. The intent is not to collect more data but to open a dialog between the inspector and boat operators on the importance of registering for an MMSI number and the need to connect GPS receivers to VHF radios. The reluctance of Boating Safety to modify their list and the possibility that other issues (such as LED lighting interference) may also need to be highlighted suggests that a separate check list for voluntary inspectors may be an alternative solution. This item will be carried over to the next meeting.

8. **Reports and Issues of the Commercial Vessel Task Group.** Rich Beattie moderated the discussion with the following highlights:

a. Revised Radio Inspection Checklists for GMDSS; Small Passenger Vessels; Bridge to Bridge; Great Lakes Vessels; and a New Checklist for AIS Inspections: We can now report that the final versions of the checklists have been posted at: <https://www.fcc.gov/eb-ship-inspection-checklists>. The USCG has posted the AIS Check List at: [https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/pdf/AIS/USCG AIS Inspection Checklist19 10 01.pdf](https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/pdf/AIS/USCG_AIS_Inspection_Checklist19_10_01.pdf), There have been a few minor corrections to the lists which have been posted.

b. Developments in Cybersecurity. There were no new reports under this item. The Coast Guard has promulgated outlines of Cybersecurity goals for various segments of the maritime industry, most recently addressing port facilities. IEC TC80 is developing a new standard IEC 63154 *Maritime Navigation and Radiocommunication Equipment and Systems Cybersecurity – General requirements, methods of testing and required test results*, and has asked national committees for comments on its committee draft. The Task Force is awaiting development of a Cybersecurity game plan by the RTCM to see how we might best support that plan.

c. Retirement of Rich Beattie, Leader of the Commercial Vessel Task Group: We are sorry to report that Rich Beattie, a stalwart member of the Task Force will retire from Radio Holland by the end of the year. We are hoping that he will continue to lead this group at least while we are having virtual meetings for the next few months.

9. **Reports and Issues of the Training Task Group.** Kurt Anderson reported with the following highlights:

a. GMDSS Question Pool Revisions: The Training Group delivered the revised Question Pool to the FCC early in October 2019. This Question Pool will probably need to be updated again in 2020 to deal with end of life for the Inmarsat F-77 SES and possible decisions on SITOR. The Question Pool for Restricted GMDSS Operator will also need revision in 2020. In an exchange of emails subsequent to the meeting, it was agreed that the date to start using the new question pool should be 31 January 2021. The FCC and/or the Coast Guard, through the National Maritime Center (NMC), should notify the COLEMs and Training Schools to shift to the new Question Pool on 31 January 2021.

b. Whether COLEMs and Training Schools are Actually Following Coast Guard and FCC Guidance in Generating 100 Questions Exams? This item and related issues have been raised before but had not yet been fully addressed by the government authorities. Russ Levin has contacted the responsible parties at the FCC and the NMC who are comfortable with the extent to which 100 question exams are being generated.

c. Whether COLEMs and Training Schools are Actually Following Coast Guard NMC Guidance in Assessment of all GMDSS Proficiencies? This item and related issues have also been raised before but had not yet been fully addressed by government authorities. Russ

Levin contacted responsible parties at the NMC who are reportedly satisfied that NMC guidance is being followed in assessment of GMDSS proficiencies.

10. Reports and Issues of the Service Agents and Manufacturers Group: Hugh Lupo was unable to attend the meeting and there had been little activity on the agenda items listed for review. The four pending issues are carried forward and the status of each is copied from the summary record of an earlier meeting:

a. Watch Continuity should be Maintained when VHF Radios are used in the Public Address Mode. The issue applies to compulsory fitted small passenger vessels with more than six passengers such as whale watching vessels, some of which operate their VHF in a Public Address (PA) mode for the entire trip rendering the channel 16 watch inoperative. This problem was addressed in the recently updated small passenger ship radio inspection checklist and should be further clarified in the FCC Part 80 rulemaking.

b. Testing during inspections should verify that DSC Radios transmit Position: Inspections have revealed that not all radios transmit the position information automatically. This is a requirement for Class A radios but was prohibited by Rec. ITU-R M. 493-14 in class D, E, and H (handheld) radios. ITU-R M 493-15 reinstated position report request capability in all Class D, E and H (handheld) VHF DSC radios. ETSI Standard EN 300 338-4 applies to Class E radios. The Task Force will review whether any further action is needed.

c. Need to expand carriage requirements so that trainees can be trained on all equipment appropriate for Sea Areas A1, A2, A3 and A4. The Task Force will develop a Petition recommending special equipment requirements for Training Vessels to enable students to train on all equipment they may find on ships operating in all Sea Areas.

d. Are Solid State Radars Incompatible with Racons and Radar SARTs? This item is retained while the Task Force determines whether further action is needed: Joe Hersey reported that unless the radar's peak transmitter power is high enough to trigger the racon or radar SART, the radar will not be compatible with either device. IMO requires that X-Band radars carried on ships subject to the SOLAS Convention be compatible with both racons and radar SARTs. Solid state radars of sufficient peak pulse power can be compatible with racons and SARTs, but lower power (e.g. FMCW) radars will not be compatible. Note that RTCM's recently adopted RTCM standard 11201.0 for Marine Radar Equipment for Ships Not Required to Comply with SOLAS Radar Carriage Requirements, does not require compatibility with racons or radar SARTs

11. GMDSS Modernization. Bob Markle noted that modernization is still an active project at the IMO. The January NCSR meeting finalized review of SOLAS Chapter IV. Revisions to supporting Resolutions are being worked on by Administrations, and there is a critical path to complete approvals by January 2021 so that amendments to SOLAS can enter into force by 1 January 2024 as planned. The requirement to be able to print MSI has been removed from Chapter IV which prompted a question whether Narrow Band Direct Printing (NBDP) was still required, the response was that NBDP was already gone if you have an alternative printing capability.

12. Review Summary Record of 9 January 2020 and Continuing Work List. The summary record of this meeting is posted on the Task Force website and no corrections have been suggested. The Continuing Work Program is appended to each agenda and updated as needed. The Task Force reviewed the Continuing Work List in a special afternoon session after this Task Force meeting and the revised version is attached to this record. The Working Group also considered needed updates to the website including a review of all GMDSS Information Bulletins and suggested deletions from the List of General GMDSS Documents. These actions were confirmed by the Task Force along with approval of the seven updated GMDSS Task Force Information Bulletins. Updating of the remaining Bulletins on Recreational Vessels and NOAA's VMS Program will be pursued by email.

13. Next Meetings of the GMDSS Task Force: The next regular Task Force meeting had been scheduled for Monday 21 September during the Joint NMEA/RTCM Annual meetings in Orlando, Florida at the DoubleTree Universal Resort 21-25 September 2020. The hosts have now cancelled the Orlando meeting so the Task Force will have another virtual meeting in early September. Thursday 10 September 2020 has been suggested.

GMDSS TASK FORCE CONTINUING WORK LIST (As Revised)

14 May 2020

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 programs that broadcast MSI for GMDSS Standards conformance (TF)
5. Review GMDSS Internet Web Sites and update Task Force portion of NAVCEN site (TF)
6. Support SOLAS Working Group planning for IMO NCSR and Joint Experts meetings (TF)
7. Advocate replacement or update of current Great Lakes Agreement with an MOU or equivalent document. (TF)
8. Advocate voluntary carriage of VHF and EPIRB/PLBs by all vessels offshore (TF)
9. Monitor FCC policy and practice on MMSI assignments (TF)
10. Monitor non-GMDSS systems: AIS, LRIT, SSAS, VDES, VMS, & E-Navigation (TF)
11. Recommend means to improve Distress Alerts by Cell Phone & Internet (TF)
12. Advocate mandatory Distress Beacons on R/V more than 3 miles offshore (TF)
13. Advocate use of the Alaska AIS Monitor Network for VHF Distress Guard (TF)
14. Monitor Developments in Cybersecurity and advise membership (TF)
15. Review GMDSS concepts and make modernization recommendations (MOD)
16. Monitor automatic response from USCG HF Commstas to test calls for validation of HF-DSC performance (CV)
17. Recommend Safety Radio and VMS Requirements for Small Fishing Vessels (CV)
18. Recommend Safety Radio & Navigation Requirements for Towing Vessels (CV)
19. Recommend Safety Radio & Navigation Outfit for Small Passenger Vessels (CV)
20. Advocate better FCC & USCG management of annual GMDSS inspections (CV)
21. Maintain Inspection Guidelines and Check Lists for selected vessel types (CV)
22. Advocate voluntary training programs for users of GMDSS systems (RV)
23. Encourage GMDSS handbooks and Internet and video training aids (RV)

24. Encourage users of VHF-DSC to Register for MMSI and connect GPS (RV)
25. Encourage Mfgs. to upgrade readability of GMDSS items in equipment manuals (SA)
26. Recommend proper interconnection of GPS receivers with DSC Radios (SA)
27. Coordinate with USCG-NMC on training uniformity (TR)
28. 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
- (MOD) Modernization Task Group

Please refer questions and proposals to Captain Jack Fuechsel at 703-963-3747 or gmdsstf@gmail.com. If you have an Internet server with spam filters, please authorize receipt of messages from gmdsstf@gmail.com

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