

Fact Sheet

Digital Selective Calling Radios:



Digital Selective Calling (DSC) is a VHF radio technology that provides recreational boaters with two unique features which will be discussed below. To be fully functional three items must be available;

- A DSC radio
- A Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number
- A compatible GPS or Loran unit

The MMSI is a unique nine (9) digit number that is assigned to a DSC radio station. If the boater has a valid Federal Communications Commission (FCC) station license or plans to operate in international waters they need to contact the FCC to get an MMSI. Otherwise, they can register with BoatU.S. or Sea Tow by obtaining an MMSI Assignment form. Forms are available on the BoatU.S. Web site <http://www.boatus.com/mmsi> or by calling 1-800-563-1536 or on the Sea Tow Web site <http://www.seatow.com/boatingsafety/mmsiinfo.htm>.

Some important points to consider are;

- Each vessel you own needs to have a discrete MMSI to be properly identified.
- The boater needs to keep their MMSI Assignment data current.
- Depending on the make and model of the DSC radio, it may limit the number of times you can try to program your MMSI number into the radio. Typically the radios offer you two (2) chances before locking out future attempts forcing you to send the radio back to the manufacturer.

DSC technology makes a VHF radio function more like a telephone. It allows boaters to send a digital call directly to another DSC equipped vessel or shore station.

- In an emergency, one push of a button and the DSC radio will send an automated digital distress alert consisting of your identification (MMSI), and position (if the radio is connected to a GPS or Loran unit) to other DSC equipped vessels and rescue facilities.
- You can privately hail another DSC equipped vessel, or shore station, if you know their MMSI. It is similar to having a VHF phone number which “rings” the radio called and then automatically switches you to a pre-determined working channel.

Rescue 21 is the Coast Guard system that will provide the May Day response capability described above. For more details on the Rescue 21 System and its availability in your area visit www.uscg.mil/rescue21.

The Global Maritime distress and Safety System (GMDSS) is the international system governing safety radio equipment on commercial ships. For more information on GMDSS visit www.navcen.uscg.gov/marcomms/gmdss/gmdssfaq.