



Radio Technical Commission for Maritime Services

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Notice to Manufacturers of Marine Radios

Easing Restrictions on Changing Own-Ship's Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) in Marine Radios

Recommended Action

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The Radio Technical Commission for Maritime Services (RTCM), the National Marine Electronics Association (NMEA), and the Global Maritime Distress & Safety System Task Force are urging that manufacturers of digital selective calling (DSC)-equipped marine radios voluntarily implement the requirements of RTCM's VHF handheld standard regarding setting of own-ship MMSI in **all** marine radios, not just portable marine radios. Those requirements state that **“Facilities shall be included in the radio to permit a manufacturer, dealer or service agent to delete the MMSI stored in the radio, so that a new MMSI can be entered in the radio.”**¹

Recognizing that many marine radios are sold by retail outlets and the internet without available support from dealers or service agents and are installed by the purchaser, it is recommended that manufacturers include instructions on deleting the MMSI stored in the radio in the support section of its website.

Background

International DSC standards have traditionally placed restrictions on operators changing own-ship maritime mobile service identities (MMSIs), once an identity has been entered into the radio. For example §12.4 of Recommendation ITU-R M.493-13 states “Once stored, it should not be possible for the user to change the MMSI without advice from the manufacturer.” IEC 62238, the Class D DSC certification test standard, implements this requirement by stating “After the MMSI has been stored, it shall not be possible to change the identity using any combination of operator controls.” ETSI EN 300 338 V.1.3.1 §4.8 states “Once an own-MMSI is programmed, this number shall not be able to be edited by means of any of the user controls. Intervention by the manufacturer or authorized representative shall be required.”

The purpose of these restrictions is to keep the casual operator from using the identity of another boater when transmitting a routine or distress call. Nevertheless, all vessel owners are held responsible not only for ensuring that the proper identity is obtained and entered into the newly purchased device, but also for ensuring that this is accomplished in older radios whenever the radio or the boat in which the radio is installed is transferred or sold. When this occurs, radios which originally had the proper MMSI entered must now have a different MMSI

¹ RTCM Standard 10150.0 *Standard for VHF-FM Portable Marine Radiotelephone Equipment with Digital Selective Calling (DSC) and Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) Location Function* §5.4. This section also includes IEC 62238's requirement that “After the MMSI has been stored, it shall not be possible to change the identity number using any combination of operator controls”.

entered.² Since the current owner is held responsible for ensuring that the radio has a properly registered MMSI, reasonable means should exist to enable that owner to meet this requirement, regardless of how the radio was originally purchased. If reasonable means do not exist to change the MMSI of a radio when it is sold or transferred, then the radio's MMSI will remain unchanged and the new owners will operate a radio having the identity of its previous user.

Registration of MMSI information is used by the U.S. Coast Guard and other rescue authorities upon receipt of a distress alert especially when follow-up communication is not available. The Global Maritime Distress & Safety System Task Force has noted that approximately 60% of own-ship MMSIs stored in VHF DSC-equipped radios in the United States appears to be invalid or improperly unregistered.

Knowingly operating any such device with an inaccurate MMSI, causing such a device to be programmed with an inaccurate MMSI, or falsifying MMSI registration information is prohibited by the US Federal Communications Commission.

This Notice has been coordinated with the Federal Communications Commission and the US Coast Guard

² Since an MMSI is intended to identify the radio stations aboard a specific vessel, it is generally not possible to keep a radio's existing MMSI but change its registration information whenever the radio is moved between vessels or sold. Therefore the identity encoded into the radio itself must be capable of being changed.