VESSEL BRIDGE-TO-BRIDGE RADIOTELEPHONE REGULATIONS
33 CFR 26

The Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act is applicable on the navigable waters of the United States (see 33 CFR § 2) which include internal waters that are subject to tidal influence, those not subject to tidal influence but that are used or are determined to be capable of being used for substantial interstate or foreign commerce, and, the territorial sea (the waters 12 nautical miles wide, adjacent to the coast of the United States and seaward of the territorial sea baseline…).

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§ 26.01 Purpose.

(a) The purpose of this part is to implement the provisions of the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act. This part:

(1) Requires the use of the vessel bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone;

(2) Provides the Coast Guard's interpretation of the meaning of important terms in the Act;

(3) Prescribes the procedures for applying for an exemption from the Act and the regulations issued under the Act and a listing of exemptions.

(b) Nothing in this part relieves any person from the obligation of complying with the rules of the road and the applicable pilot rules.

§ 26.02 Definitions.

For the purpose of this part and interpreting the Act:

"Secretary" means the Secretary of the Department in which the Coast Guard is operating;

"Act" means the "Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act", 33 U.S.C. sections 1201-1208;

"Length" is measured from end to end over the deck excluding sheer;

"Power-driven vessel" means any vessel propelled by machinery;

"Territorial sea" means all waters as defined in § 2.22(a)(1) of this chapter;

"Towing vessel means any commercial vessel engaged in towing another vessel astern, alongside, or by pushing ahead;

"Vessel Traffic Services (VTS)" means a service implemented under Part 161 of this chapter by the United States Coast Guard designed to improve the safety and efficiency of vessel traffic and to protect the environment. The VTS has the capability to interact with marine traffic and respond to traffic situations developing in the VTS area; and

"Vessel Traffic Service Area or VTS Area" means the geographical area encompassing a specific VTS area of service as described in Part 161 of this chapter. This area of service may be subdivided into

sectors for the purpose of allocating responsibility to individual Vessel Traffic Centers or to identify different operating requirements.

Note: Although regulatory jurisdiction is limited to the navigable waters of the United States, certain vessels will be encouraged or may be required, as a condition of port entry, to report beyond this area to facilitate traffic management within the VTS area.

§ 26.03 Radiotelephone required.

(a) Unless an exemption is granted under §26.09 and except as provided in paragraph (a)(4) of this section, this part applies to:

(1) Every power-driven vessel of 20 meters or over in length while navigating;

(2) Every vessel of 100 gross tons and upward carrying one or more passengers for hire while navigating;

(3) Every towing vessel of 26 feet or over in length while navigating; and

(4) Every dredge and floating plant engaged in or near a channel or fairway in operations likely to restrict or affect navigation of other vessels except for an unmanned or intermittently manned floating plant under the control of a dredge.

(b) Every vessel, dredge, or floating plant described in paragraph (a) of this section must have a radiotelephone on board capable of operation from its navigational bridge, or in the case of a dredge, from its main control station, and capable of transmitting and receiving on the frequency or frequencies within the 156-162 Mega-Hertz band using the classes of emissions designated by the Federal Communications Commission for the exchange of navigational information.

(c) The radiotelephone required by paragraph (b) of this section must be carried on board the described vessels, dredges, and floating plants upon the navigable waters of the United States.

(d) The radiotelephone required by paragraph (b) of this section must be capable of transmitting and receiving on VHF FM channel 22A (157.1 MHz).

(e) While transiting any of the following waters, each vessel described in paragraph (a) of this section also must have on board a radiotelephone capable of transmitting and receiving on VHF FM channel 67 (156.375 MHz):

(1) The lower Mississippi River from the territorial sea boundary, and within either the Southwest Pass safety fairway or the South Pass safety fairway specified in 33 CFR 166.200, to mile 242.4 AHP (Above Head of Passes) near Baton Rouge;

(2) The Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet from the territorial sea boundary, and within the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet Safety Fairway specified in 33 CFR 166.200, to that channel's junction with the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal; and

(3) The full length of the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal from its junction with the Mississippi River to that canal's entry to Lake Pontchartrain at the New Seabrook vehicular bridge.

(f) In addition to the radiotelephone required by paragraph (b) of this section, each vessel described in paragraph (a) of this section while transiting any waters within a Vessel Traffic Service Area, must have on board a radiotelephone capable of transmitting and receiving on the VTS designated frequency in Table 161.12(c) (VTS Call Signs, Designated Frequencies, and Monitoring Areas). (Located on pages 214 and 215.)

Note: A single VHF FM radio capable of scanning or sequential monitoring (often referred to as "dual watch" capability) will not meet the requirements for two radios.

§ 26.04 Use of the designated frequency.

(a) No person may use the frequency designated by the Federal Communications Commission under section 8 of the Act, 33 U.S.C. 1207(a), to transmit any information other than information necessary for the safe navigation of vessels or necessary tests.

(b) Each person who is required to maintain a listening watch under section 5 of the Act shall, when necessary, transmit and confirm, on the designated frequency, the intentions of his vessel and any other information necessary for the safe navigation of vessels.

(c) Nothing in these regulations may be construed as prohibiting the use of the designated frequency to communicate with shore stations to obtain or furnish information necessary for the safe navigation of vessels.

(d) On the navigable waters of the United States, channel 13 (156.65 MHz) is the designated frequency required to be monitored in accordance with §26.05(a) except that in the area prescribed in §26.03(e), channel 67 (156.375 MHz) is an additional frequency.

(e) On those navigable waters of the United States within a VTS area, the designated VTS frequency is the designated frequency required to be monitored in accordance with §26.05.

Note: As stated in 47 CFR 80.148(b), a VHF watch on Channel 16 (156.800Mhz) is not required on vessels subject to the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act and participating in a Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) system when the watch is maintained on both the vessel bridge-to-bridge frequency and a designated VTS frequency.

§ 26.05 Use of Radiotelephone.

Section 5 of the Act states that the radiotelephone required by this Act is for the exclusive use of the master or person in charge of the vessel, or the person designated by the master or person in charge

to pilot or direct the movement of the vessel, who shall maintain a listening watch on the designated frequency. Nothing herein shall be interpreted as precluding the use of portable radiotelephone equipment to satisfy the requirements of this Act.

§ 26.06 Maintenance of radiotelephone; failure of radiotelephone.

Section 6 of the Act states that whenever radiotelephone capability is required by this Act, a vessel's radiotelephone equipment shall be maintained in effective operating condition. If the radiotelephone equipment carried aboard a vessel ceases to operate, the master shall exercise due diligence to restore it or cause it to be restored to effective operating condition at the earliest practicable time. The failure of a vessel's radiotelephone equipment shall not, in itself, constitute a violation of this Act, nor shall it obligate the master of any vessel to moor or anchor his vessel; however, the loss of radiotelephone capability shall be given consideration in the navigation of the vessel.

§ 26.07 Communications.

No person may use the services of, and no person may serve as, a person required to maintain a listening watch under section 5 of the Act, 33 U.S.C. 1204, unless the person can communicate in the English language.

§ 26.08 Exemption procedures.

(a) The Commandant has redelegated to the Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety and Environmental Protection, U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, with the reservation that this authority shall not be further redelegated, the authority to grant exemptions from provisions of the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act and this part.

(b) Any person may petition for an exemption from any provision of the Act or this part;

(c) Each petition must be submitted in writing to U.S. Coast Guard, Marine Safety and Environmental Protection, 2100 Second Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20593-0001, and must state:

(1) The provisions of the Act or this part from which an exemption is requested; and

(2) The reasons why marine navigation will not be adversely affected if the exemption is granted and if the exemption relates to a local communication system how that system would fully comply with the intent of the concept of the Act but would not conform in detail if the exemption is granted.

Table 161.12(c)—VTS and VMRS Centers, Call Signs/MMSI, Designated Frequencies, and Monitoring Areas

Center MMSI[1] *Call Sign*	Designated frequency (Channel Designation) —purpose[2]	Monitoring area[3,4]
Berwick Bay		
—003669950		
Berwick Traffic	156.550 MHz (Ch. 11)	The waters south of 29°45' N., west of 91°10' W., north of 29°37' N., and east of 91°18' W.
Buzzards Bay		
Buzzards Bay Control [5]	156.600 MHz (Ch. 12)	The waters east and north of a line drawn from the southern tangent of Sakonnet Point, Rhode Island, in approximate position latitude 41°–27.2' N, longitude 70°–11.7' W, to the Buzzards Bay Entrance Light in approximate position latitude 41°–23.5' N, longitude 71°–02.0' W, and then to the southwestern tangent of Cuttyhunk Island, Massachusetts, at approximate position latitude 41°–24.6' N, longitude 70°–57.0' W, and including all of the Cape Cod Canal to its eastern entrance, except that the area of New Bedford harbor within the confines (north of) the hurricane barrier, and the passages through the Elizabeth Islands, is not considered to be "Buzzards Bay".
Houston-Galveston		
—003669954		The navigable waters north of 29° N., west of 94°20' W., south of 29°49' N., and east of 95°20' W.
Houston Traffic	156.550 MHz (Ch. 11) 156.250 Mhz (Ch. 5A) —For Sailing Plans only	The navigable waters north of a line extending due west from the southern most end of Exxon Dock #1 (20°43.37' N., 95°01.27' W.).
Houston Traffic	156.600 MHz (Ch. 12) 156.250 Mhz (Ch. 5A) —For Sailing Plans only	The navigable waters south of a line extending due west from the southern most end of Exxon Dock #1 (29°43.37' N., 95°01.27' W.)
Los Angeles/Long Beach		
—MMSI(To be determined)		
San Pedro Traffic	156.700 MHz (Ch.14)	*Vessel Movement Reporting System Area:* The navigable waters within a 25 nautical mile radius of Point Fermin Light (33°42.3' N., 118°17.6' W.).
Louisville		
—MMSI(To be determined)		
Louisville Traffic	156.650 MHz (Ch. 13)	The waters of the Ohio River between McAlpine Locks (Mile 606) and Twelve Mile Island (Mile 593), only when the McAlpine upper pool gauge is at approximately 13.0 feet or above.
Lower Mississippi River[6]		
—0036699952		
New Orleans Traffic	156.700 MHz (Ch.14)	The navigable waters of the Lower Mississippi River below 30°38.7' N., 91°17.5' W. (Port Hudson Light at 255 miles Above Head of Passes (AHP)), the Southwest Pass, and, within a 12 nautical miles radius around 28°54.3' N., 89°25.7' W. (Southwest Pass Entrance Light at 19.9 miles Below Head of Passes).
New Orleans Traffic	156.600 MHz (Ch.12)	*New Orleans Sector.* The navigable waters of the Lower Mississippi River bounded on the north by a line drawn perpendicularly at 29°56.4' N., 90°08.36' W. and on the south by a line drawn perpendicularly at 29°56.24' N., 89°59.86' W. (88 and 106 miles AHP).
New York		
—003669951		
New York Traffic	156.550 MHz (Ch. 11) —For Sailing Plans only 156.600 MHz (Ch. 12) —For vessels at anchor	The area consists of the navigable waters of the Lower New York Bay bounded on the east by a line drawn from Norton Point to Breezy Point; on the south by a line connecting the entrance buoys at the Ambrose Channel, Swash Channel, and Sandy Hook Channel to Sandy Hook Point; and on the southeast including the waters of Sandy Hook Bay south to a line drawn at latitude 40° 25' N; then west in the Raritan Bay to the Raritan River Railroad Bridge, then north into waters of the Arthur Kill and Newark Bay to the Lehigh Valley Draw Bridge at latitude 40° 41.9N; and then east including the waters of the Kill Van Kull and the Upper New York Bay north to a line drawn east-west from the Holland Tunnel ventilator shaft at latitude 40° 43.7' N, longitude 74° 01.6' W, in the Hudson River; and then continuing east including the waters of the East River to the Throgs Neck Bridge, excluding the Harlem River.
New York Traffic	156.700 MHz (Ch. 14)	The navigable waters of the Lower New York Bay west of a line drawn from Norton Point to Breezy Point; and north of a line connecting the entrance buoys of Ambrose Channel, Swash Channel, and Sandy Hook Channel, to Sandy Hook Point; on the southeast including the waters of the Sandy Hook Bay south to a line drawn at latitude 40° 25' N; then west into the waters of Raritan Bay East Reach to a line drawn from Great Kills Light south through Raritan Bay East Reach LGB #14 to Comfort PT, NJ; then north including the waters of the Upper New York Bay south of 40° 42.40' N (Brooklyn Bridge) and 40° 43.70' N (Holland Tunnel Ventilator Shaft); west through the KVK into the Arthur Kill north of 40° 38.25' N (Arthur Kill Railroad Bridge); then north into the waters of the Newark Bay, south of 40° 41.95' N (Lehigh Valley Draw Bridge).
New York Traffic	156.600 MHz (Ch. 12)	The navigable waters of the Raritan Bay south to a line drawn at latitude 40° 26' N; then west of a line drawn from Great Kills Light south through the Raritan Bay East Reach LGB #14 to Point Comfort, NJ; then west to the Raritan River Railroad Bridge; and north including the waters of the Arthur Kill to 40° 28.25' N (Arthur Kill Railroad Bridge); including the waters of the East River north of 40° 42.40' N (Brooklyn Bridge) to the Throgs Neck Bridge, excluding the Harlem River.
Port Arthur[6]		
—003669955		
Sabine Traffic	To be determined	The navigable waters south of 30°10' N., east of 94°20' W., west of 93°22' W, and, north of 29° 10' N.

Prince William Sound		
—003669958		
Valdez Traffic	156.650 MHz (Ch. 13)	The navigable waters south of 61°05' N., east of 147°20' W., north of 60° N., and west of 146°30' W.; and, all navigable waters in Port Valdez.
Puget Sound[7]		
Seattle Traffic —003669957	156.700 MHz (Ch. 14)	The waters of Puget Sound, Hood Canal and adjacent waters south of a line connecting Nodule Point and Bush Point in Admiralty Inlet and south of a line drawn due east from the southernmost tip of Possession Point on Whidbey Island to the shoreline.
Seattle Traffic —003669957	156.250 MHz (Ch. 5A)	The waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca east of 124°40' W. excluding the waters in the central portion of the Strait of Juan de Fuca north and east of Race Rocks; the navigable waters of the Strait of Georgia east of 122°52' W.; the San Juan Island Archipelago, Rosario Strait, Bellingham Bay; Admiralty Inlet north of a line connecting Nodule Point and Bush Point and all waters east of Whidbey Island North of a line drawn due east from the southernmost tip of Possession Point on Whidbey Island to the shoreline.
Tofino Traffic —003160012	156.725 MHz (Ch. 74)	The waters west of 124°40' W. within 50 nautical miles of the coast of Vancouver Island including the waters north of 48° N., and east of 127° W.
Victoria Traffic —03160010	156.550 MHz (Ch. 11)	The waters of the Strait of Georgia west of 122°52' W., the navigable waters of the central Strait of Juan de Fuca north and east of Race Rocks, including the Gulf Island Archipelago, Boundary Pass and Haro Strait.
San Francisco		
—003669956		
San Francisco Traffic	156.700 MHz (Ch. 14)	The navigable waters of the San Francisco Offshore Precautionary Area, the navigable waters shoreward of the San Francisco Offshore Precautionary Area east of 122°42.0' W. and north of 37°40.0' N. extending eastward through the Golden Gate, and the navigable waters of San Francisco Bay and as far east as the port of Stockton on the San Joaquin River, as far north as the port of Sacramento on the Sacramento River.
San Francisco Traffic	156.600 MHz (Ch. 12)	The navigable waters within a 38 nautical mile radius of Mount Tamalpais (37°55.8' N., 122°34.6' W.) west of 122°42.0' W. and south of 37°40.0' N and excluding the San Francisco Offshore Precautionary Area.
St. Marys River		
—003669953		
Soo Traffic	156.600 MHz (Ch. 12)	The waters of the St. Marys River between 45°57' N. (De Tour Reef Light) and 46°38.7' N. (Ile Parisienne Light), except the St. Marys Falls Canal and those navigable waters east of a line from 46°04.16' N. and 46°01.57' N. (La Pointe to Sims Point in Potagannissing Bay and Worsley Bay).

Notes:

[1]Maritime Mobile Service Identifier (MMSI) is a unique nine-digit number assigned that identifies ship stations, ship earth stations, coast stations, coast earth stations, and group calls for use by a digital selective calling (DSC) radio, an INMARSAT ship earth station or AIS. AIS requirements are set forth in §§161.21 and 164.46 of this subchapter. The requirements set forth in §§161.21 and 164.46 of this subchapter apply in those areas denoted with a MMSI number.

[2]In the event of a communication failure, difficulties or other safety factors, the Center may direct or permit a user to monitor and report on any other designated monitoring frequency or the bridge-to-bridge navigational frequency, 156.650 MHz (Channel 13) or 156.375 MHz (Ch. 67), to the extent that doing so provides a level of safety beyond that provided by other means. The bridge-to-bridge navigational frequency, 156.650 MHz (Ch. 13), is used in certain monitoring areas where the level of reporting does not warrant a designated frequency.

[3]All geographic coordinates (latitude and longitude) are expressed in North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83).

[4]Some monitoring areas extend beyond navigable waters. Although not required, users are strongly encouraged to maintain a listening watch on the designated monitoring frequency in these areas. Otherwise, they are required to maintain watch as stated in 47 CFR 80.148.

[5]In addition to the vessels denoted in section 161.16 of this chapter, requirements set forth in subpart B of 33 CFR part 161 also apply to any vessel transiting VMRS Buzzards Bay required to carry a bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone by part 26 of this chapter.

[6]Until rules regarding VTS Lower Mississippi River and VTS Port Arthur are published, vessels are exempted of all VTS and VMRS requirements set forth in 33 CFR part 161, except those set forth in §§161.21 and 164.46 of this subchapter.

[7]A Cooperative Vessel Traffic Service was established by the United States and Canada within adjoining waters. The appropriate Center administers the rules issued by both nations; however, enforces only its own set of rules within its jurisdiction. Note, the bridge-to-bridge navigational frequency, 156.650 MHz (Ch. 13), is not so designated in Canadian waters, therefore users are encouraged and permitted to make passing arrangements on the designated monitoring frequencies.