GMDSS INFORMATION BULLETIN

TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF GMDSS RADIO OPERATORS

USCG GMDSS STCW requirements

The U.S. Coast Guard is responsible for compliance with the 1995 revision of the IMO Convention on the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchstanding (STCW 95 as updated by 2012 Manila Convention). The U.S. implementation of this treaty revision mandates that all officers-in-charge of a navigation watch complete resident training at a Coast Guard approved STCW 70-hour course in order to serve aboard compulsory GMDSS vessels.

The Coast Guard will issue a GMDSS endorsement on your USCG MMC upon successful completion of an approved GMDSS course. You must have an FCC GMDSS Radio Operator License ("DO") to legally operate a shipboard GMDSS console. You must have the USCG STCW endorsement to serve as an OICNW on a GMDSS equipped vessel subject to STCW. The STCW 95 convention requires that all masters and mates on GMDSS vessels hold the GOC. One of these must be designated as the radio operator responsible for distress communications during an emergency. A second license holder must be designated as the backup operator

A few GMDSS vessel categories and most fishing vessels are exempted from the STCW 95 training requirement. However, many fishing vessels may have to meet GMDSS equipment carriage requirements. GMDSS ships must comply with both the FCC and the Coast Guard requirements.

GMDSS Training Institutions and Coast Guard Approved GMDSS Courses

There are a number of maritime training institutions that offer GMDSS STCW training. Currently approved GMDSS courses are listed at: https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Portals/9/NMC/pdfs/courses/courses.pdf. The GMDSS classes are intermingled with all other STCW courses.

The USCG STCW course will present academic theory and equipment proficiency or competency training. The more stringent STCW 95 requirements were imposed by IMO in recognition that many GMDSS operators certified under existing national regulations were marginally competent as evidenced by an excessive false alert rate in most GMDSS systems.

GMDSS Sea Areas: Equipment Carriage and Operator requirements

There are four GMDSS Sea Areas: A1, A2, A3 and A4. The U.S. has decided not to declare Sea Area A2. Vessels must carry the equipment specified in CFR Title 47 Part 80 for their intended Sea Area of operation. Therefore, as a practical manner officers are certified for either the A3/A4 USCG 70-hour class (GOC) or the A1 USCG ROC 3-day class. Very few U.S. vessels operate solely in an A1 Sea Area. Sea Area A1 is a coastal zone extending out 20 - 30 miles from shore, which is established wherever the Coast Guard has completed upgrades of the VHF shore network to Digital Selective Calling (DSC). The Coast Guard Auxiliary and the U.S. Power Squadrons are planning to offer very brief courses in the operation of VHF-DSC for operators on voluntarily equipped vessels.

Available FCC GMDSS Licenses

Officers serving on A3/A4 vessels must hold **t**he GMDSS Radio Operator's License (GOC, to use the IMO terminology.)

Officers serving on A1 vessels must hold the Restricted GMDSS Radio Operator's License, (ROC to use the IMO terminology.) This special license will apply to operators of GMDSS ships that sail exclusively in Sea Area A1.

The GMDSS Maintainer License is required for at least one shipboard person on GMDSS vessels which have elected on-board maintenance as one of the available maintenance options.

The FCC issues licenses to radio operators and equipment maintainers under the general guidance of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to personnel involved in the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS).

Persons who pass either the GOC or ROC courses in a USCG approved GMDSS course will have earned the appropriate FCC license. This is because Elements 7 and 7R are a joint project of the FCC and USCG. Most approved schools are either their own FCC Colem or have a relationship with one and typically file on the student's behalf for the FCC license.

Otherwise FCC licenses are issued to candidates who pass a multiple-choice examination administered by FCC contractors (Colems). These exams are drawn from question pools, which are in the public domain:

https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/commercial-radio-operator-license-program/examinations

GMDSS Radio Operators License (DO)	Written Element(s) 1 & 7
GMDSS Restricted Radio Operators license (RG)	Written Element(s) 1 & 7R
GMDSS Radio Maintainers License (DM)	Written Element(s) 1, 3 & 9

Technicians conducting annual GMDSS inspections would typically hold a combined license:

GMDSS Radio Operator/Maintainer license (DB)	Written Elements(s) 1, 3, 7 & 9

Many non-GMDSS vessels and officers are required to hold the:

Marine Radio Operator Permit (MP)	Written Element 1

Which Operators Require Licenses?

https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/commercial-radio-operator-license-program

U.S. cargo vessels over 300 tons, regardless of their area of operation, were required to be GMDSS compliant by 1 February 1999. Vessels carrying more than 12 passengers for hire and operating on international voyages were also required to be GMDSS compliant by 1 February 1999. Vessels carrying more than 6 passengers operating on domestic routes only are not required to be GMDSS compliant but are subject to other radio and licensing requirements and the operators must hold a Marine Radio Operator's Permit. Small commercial vessels and recreational vessels, which do not go on international voyages, are not required to outfit for GMDSS but may use VHF-DSC GMDSS equipment on a voluntary basis without any operator licensing requirements.

The GMDSS Task Force

This Information Bulletin was approved on 22 January 1998 and updated on 14 May 2020, by the GMDSS Task Force. The Task Force is a Coast Guard sponsored group established to resolve implementation problems and disseminate GMDSS information.