

## U.S. NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE GMDSS INFORMATION BULLETIN

### TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF GMDSS RADIO OPERATORS

#### Available Licenses

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). Both licenses are issued to candidates who pass a multiple-choice examination administered by FCC contractors drawn from question pools, which are in the public domain. The GMDSS Radio Operator's License (GOC, to use the ITU terminology) is required for designated GMDSS shipboard radio operators. While the FCC Rules only require two GOC holders, the new 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 back up operator. 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 options.

The U.S. Coast Guard is responsible for compliance with the new 1995 revision of the IMO Convention on the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchstanding (STCW 95). The U.S. implementation of this treaty revision mandates that all deck officers complete resident training at a Coast Guard approved STCW 95 GMDSS course by 1 February 2002. The Coast Guard will issue an STCW 95 endorsement on successful completion of the GMDSS course and certain other STCW requirements. A few GMDSS vessel categories and all fishing vessels are exempted from the STCW 95 training requirement. 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.

Since GMDSS ships must comply with both the FCC and the Coast Guard requirements, ships should arrange for all deck officers to hold the FCC's GOC and receive the training required for the Coast Guard STCW GMDSS endorsement. The FCC license can be acquired through a self-study program but the Task Force strongly recommends resident GMDSS training courses for improved operator competence. Although any person aboard ship may hold the FCC's GOC, most ship operators are certifying only mates for this purpose since they all require the GOC license and the Coast Guard's STCW 95 endorsements.

#### Which Operators Require Licenses?

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.

#### GMDSS Training Institutions and Coast Guard Approved GMDSS Courses

There are a number of maritime training institutions that offer GMDSS training. Approved GMDSS courses are listed at <http://www.uscg.mil/nmc/training/gmdss.pdf>. As GMDSS STCW 95 training courses are approved, they will be listed on this web site.

#### Question Pools for GMDSS Examinations

The Coast Guard's National Maritime Center (NMC) approved a GMDSS Question Pool developed by the Task Force for the competency exam required to demonstrate GMDSS proficiency and qualify for the STCW 95 certification. The FCC previously maintained a separate Question Pool for the examination for GMDSS Radio Operator's License but now uses the same Question Pool as the Coast Guard. The FCC exam previously used a 70 question exam but their requirement has been modified to accept the 100-question exam used by the Coast Guard. One GMDSS examination administered by the training institution with the results provided additionally to an FCC COLEM will normally suffice for both purposes. . Question Pools approved by the Coast Guard's National Maritime Center (NMC) to meet GMDSS training are found at [http://wireless.fcc.gov/commoperators/index.htm?job=question\\_pools](http://wireless.fcc.gov/commoperators/index.htm?job=question_pools) (click 1 and 7 or 7R).

### **Restricted GMDSS Radio Operator's License for Sea Area A1**

The FCC recently created the Restricted GMDSS Radio Operator's License, ROC,(again, the ITU terminology) for Sea Area A1. Sea Area A1 is a coastal zone extending to about 20 miles from shore, which will be established when the Coast Guard completes its upgrade of the VHF shore network to Digital Selective Calling (DSC). This special license will apply to operators of GMDSS ships that sail exclusively in Sea Area A1. The NMC has approved a new Task Force recommended course to qualify for compliance with STCW Certification for GMDSS ships sailing within Sea Area A1. The FCC has also adopted the GMDSS Question Pool for the ROC Examination so that a single exam can meet both Coast Guard and FCC requirements. It is also anticipated that short training courses qualifying for the Coast Guard's Sea Area A1 STCW endorsement will be offered by most of the established GMDSS training institutions. 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.

### **The GMDSS Task Force**

This Information Bulletin was approved on 22 January 1998 and updated on 16 May 2002 and 6 August 2009 by the National GMDSS Implementation Task Force, a Coast Guard sponsored group established to resolve implementation problems and disseminate GMDSS information. The Task Force is soliciting feedback on problems encountered and invites responses to Captain Jack Fuechsel, Task Force Executive Director, 1600 North Oak Street, #427, Arlington VA 22209; phone 703-527-0484; or email [gmdss@comcast.net](mailto:gmdss@comcast.net). See also the Coast Guard GMDSS Internet web site: [www.navcen.uscg.gov/marcomms](http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/marcomms) (click on GMDSS, then on GMDSS Task Force). Duplication and reprinting of this Bulletin is authorized in order to reach the widest possible audience.