GMDSS TASK FORCE

Newsletter and Summary Record of 10 September 2025 Meeting

1. **The Task Force Meeting.** This Newsletter reports on the recent meeting of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) Task Force sponsored by the U.S. Coast Guard and the Radio Technical Commission for Maritime Services (RTCM) and held virtually on 10 September 2025. The Task Force is dedicated to monitoring the success and shortcomings of the GMDSS. The Task Force is also active in current efforts to modernize the GMDSS and monitors related developments in maritime radio and electronic navigation (e-navigation). The Task Force advocates voluntary use of radio safety equipment by all vessels and makes recommendations to government authorities to improve safety at sea regulations.

2. **Task Force membership.** Membership is open to individuals associated with commercial vessel operations, recreational vessel interests, training institutions, service agents, manufacturers, government authorities and any interested person or organization, and there is no fee for participation. New members are welcome; to join, send your name, organization (if any), email address, and telephone number (optional) to the Director, Bill Cairns, at gmdsstf@rtcm.org. Members who are unable to attend Task Force meetings are invited to participate by email correspondence and to connect with Task Force meetings by conference call or virtual meeting platform. This Newsletter goes out to over 6000 members after each meeting. The Task Force also maintains a website at https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/task-force-background.

3. **The Summary Record.** This record of the meeting is provided for information and will be posted on the Task Force portion of the Coast Guard NAVCEN web site and the RTCM web site. The GMDSS Task Force held a virtual meeting on 10 Sep 2025. The meeting was attended by 29 members through Microsoft Teams, or by phone.

4. **Distribution of Information Papers:**

a. The following Papers of interest were displayed and are available to all on the website: https://www.joecel.com/GMDSSTaskForce

i. US VHF Channels Annex D Draft IEC_62238_ED2-8Sep2024
ii. SUBMERSIBLE TITAN MBI REPORT (04AUG2025)
iii. Shipcom holdings DA-25-728A1
iv. NCSR 12-20-Add.1 - Report to the Maritime Safety Committee (Secretariat)
v. NCSR 12-20 - Report to the Maritime Safety Committee (Secretariat)
vi. IMO-ITU EG 21-6 - Liaison statement from ITU-R Working Party 5B
vii. IMO-ITU EG 21-1 - Agenda

5. **Recreational Vessel Group:** Gene Danko from the US Power Squadron leads the Recreational Vessel Task Group. He was unable to attend.

- **a. Report of the National Boating Safety Advisory Committee**: Brian Moore updated the group on the status of the National Safe Boating Advisory Committee, noting delays in member approval and the absence of a meeting date, and discussed ongoing efforts in the MMSI subcommittee to develop a legislative mechanism for numbering autonomous vessels, with input from state agencies and the NBDC. Brian Moore

reported that the National Safe Boating Advisory Committee is awaiting DHS (S1) signature before moving to presidential approval, with no meeting date set. The committee currently has 21 members, but one may not be approved, potentially requiring a new member search. The committee name is expected to remain unchanged for now but could change as the process continues.

Brian Moore explained that there is currently no mechanism to assign numbers to autonomous vessels, which often do not meet the five-ton requirement. Legislative changes are being considered to address this, and Moore is coordinating with the NBDC to explore solutions. States are hesitant to number these vessels, and Moore recommends that vessels must have AIS and both audible and visual identifiers before being numbered. This is intended to facilitate tracking and accountability as the number of such vessels increases.

6. Commercial Vessel Task Group: Eric Weber (American Radio Association), a volunteer to the Task Group, had nothing to report at this time but would be seeking input from his members for the next meeting of the Task Force.

7. Service Agents and Manufacturers Task Group: Bill Cairns requested assistance to reinforce the Service Agents and Manufacturers Task Group, asking for volunteers from the group. Abel Jarque (Intellian) expressed interest in contributing to this group.

8. Training Task Group: Kurt Anderson from MITAGS gave an update on the Group's efforts. They have made progress on element 1 for GMDSS Maintainers. They are about 90% done on the Iridium STCW Lab proficiencies and operator competencies. After some pending work, they plan to forward the GMDSS Operator Requirements to the Service Agents working group for their input.

9. Coast Guard Reports: USCG provided updates on IMO, ITU, and IEC activities, including the approval of VDES as an AIS substitute, State Department involvement in IMO, and ongoing work on standards for digital voice, VHF channels, and autonomous vessel identification.:

a. Updates on IMO NCSR/MSC meetings: : Patrick Gallagher noted increased State Department oversight in IMO activities, requiring extended review periods for documents and reducing the number of US participants in expert groups. The Coast Guard is adjusting to these changes, with Ben Hawkins currently screening IMO-related work following Jeff Lantz' retirement.

b. Joint IMO/ITU Experts Group: Patrick Gallagher noted that the Experts Group is looking into the digitalization of the VHF band. One of the big topics EG is working on is the IMO positions for the next World Radio Conference. The upcoming EG is basically the next to last chance to make an impact before IMO will have to send in its positions to the ITU for WRC.

c. ICAO/IMO Joint Working Group: Ed Thiedeman addressed the ICAO/IMO Joint Working Group. This year is the 32nd session and it will be hosted in Sydney, Australia. Papers are due this month. He noted that there's an additional paper review by State Department that has slowed the process somewhat. The focus of this session is going to be looking at proposed changes to the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) manuals.

Topics also include submersibles because of the TITAN submarine implosion that occurred over a year ago, as well as the psychology for search and rescue. It is scheduled for 3 to 7 November.

d. NAVTEX outages: Patrick Geddes addressed the issue of NAVTEX outages, explaining the challenges with the age of their equipment and the efforts to improve the situation. They continue to struggle with aging infrastructure as the first level maintainers try to keep the transmitters up and operating. At the program level, there isn't yet a decision on the way forward with this. It was previously noted that the main issue with NAVTEX outages is the old and obsolete equipment, which is difficult to repair when it goes down. The Coast Guard is working on developing the expertise and ability to repair some of the equipment components themselves to improve the situation. Network connectivity issues are a factor, and the Coast Guard is switching network providers from Verizon to AT&T in hopes of better response and reliability. There is also a need for better training of technicians to handle the older equipment. The Coast Guard is working with Nautel, the equipment transmitter provider, to develop training programs for their technicians. He discussed the efforts to replace the old NAVTEX equipment, although funding has been a challenge.

e. ITU-R WP5B Update: Ross Norsworthy reported that ITU Working Party 5B is finalizing major updates to the AIS (Recommendation ITU-R M.1371) and VDES (Recommendation ITU-R M.2092) standards, with expected publication in the first quarter of the following year. The AIS standard recommendation ITU-R M.1371 is being updated. It has taken over 10 years and the hope is to finish it in the meeting in November. The AIS M.1371 and VDES M.2092 standards are expected to be finalized and sent to Study Group 5 in November and, if approved, they'll both be published in the first quarter of next year. WP5B is also advancing the draft standard for digital voice communications over VHF. It is expected to be upgraded from a preliminary draft to draft. WP5B is also updating the MMSI numbering standard. Recommendation ITU-R M.585 MMSIs had some changes in it to accommodate the new generation beacons because COSPAS-SARSAT software needed to be upgraded.

f. LED Lighting: Joe Hersey discussed the status of EMC standards and the integration of RTCM SC137 work into IEC 60533 EMC standard to protect devices from LED interference. He also mentioned that the updated standards would include frequency bands up to 6 GHz. He noted that RTCM SC137's recommendations were integrated into the ABYC navigation light standard to protect devices from LED interference. Joe Hersey explained that the IEC 60533 IEC standard would be incorporated by reference into various IEC electrical standards, including the ISO standard for searchlights. No further action is needed on this item at this time and it will be DELETED.

g. Four Digit Numbering of VHF Channels: The Coast Guard previously issued a Maritime Safety Information Bulletin on this topic. Joe Hersey provided an update on the transition to four-digit channel numbers for VHF radios, noting that new radios are already being sold with the updated numbering system. Joe Hersey and Glenn Coady (Canada) discussed changes to VHF channel assignments resulting from WARC 15 and 19, which affect channel availability in Canadian waters. VHF duplex channels 27 and 28 have been replaced by simplex channels 1027 and 1028, although these two new channels are not yet recognized in the U.S. VHF duplex channels 24, 25, 26, 84, 85 and 86 are also being removed effective 1 January 2030. VHF radios being updated on SOLAS ships are no longer able to operate on these channels when set to the international channel mode. Canadian VTSs use five of these six channels. Canadian authorities are preparing a ship safety bulletin to address the need for ships to switch to Canadian configuration when entering Canadian waters.

h. VHF-FM voice blocking AIS on own ship and close by: Joe Hersey described the persistent issue of VHF voice transmissions blocking AIS and VDES signals, with RTCM's draft standard on hold due to lack of international support. Ross Norsworthy explained the US was proposing that the new VDES standard address this by recommending blocking specifications accommodate a 2-meter vertical antenna separation, which has been effective for legacy analog AIS and would future-proof installations. ITU WP5B will be considering changes to the blocking standard for VDES.

i. Status of Class D DSC Radios: Joe Hersey reported that RTCM has completed its work on the Class D DSC standard, which has been handed off to IEC for committee draft voting. The updated standard aims to resolve longstanding conflicts between ITU and IEC requirements, also addressing a requirement for integral GNSS, with publication expected by mid-next year

j. Radar SART Performance: The group debated whether to recommend the removal of radar SARTs in favor of AIS SARTs, considering GNSS interference issues in certain regions. Interim actions include enhancing training for SAR operators to detect both radar and AIS SARTs and possibly updating radar standards or procedures. The United States had submitted a paper to IMO MSC 109 with a draft circular. The circular was approved but MSC did not act on the USCG attempt to eliminate the Radar SART and replace it with an AIS SART. It was noted that there are numerous examples of GNSS interference in Europe and perhaps elsewhere which would make an AIS SART useless. The USCG is considering addressing the radar SART in its Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP). The TF agreed from the discussion that we have an action to pursue an input to MSC to present the US position to MSC and provide some of the ideas that were discussed today and the second is that the Coast Guard needs to review its TTP to ensure the training of SAR unit operators in how to detect both AIS and radar SARTs.

k. AIS Mobile ATON: Joe Hersey discussed the status of the AIS Mobile ATON standard, which will be updated to incorporate the new single-slot message 28 after ITU finalizes it. The update is expected to improve compatibility and recognition of messages across different systems. Ross Norsworthy described ongoing efforts to include operational status bits in AIS messages to indicate autonomous or remotely operated vessel modes. The proposal is to use two bits for ‘operational status,’ avoiding the term 'crewing status.'

l. Changes to COMSAR.1/Circ.32: Joe Hersey discussed the revision 3 changes to COMSAR Circular 32, *Harmonization of GMDSS Requirements for Radio Installations on board SOLAS ships*, which now allows a single MF/HF radio installation to meet both primary and duplicated MF/HF radio installation requirements in Sea Area A3. With no pending further revisions to the Circular, this item will be DELETED.

m. Interpreting USCG uninspected fishing vessel carriage requirements: 46 CFR 245(c) addresses satellite communications capability. The USCG is developing a Safety Alert to notify the public that satellite system providers other than Iridium and Inmarsat do not meet the regulations for fishing vessels. USCG SAR and Commercial Vessel Compliance has this topic under discussion and additionally with the FCC to come up with a consensus across all the major stakeholders.

n. Transition of SARSAT Program from NOAA to Coast Guard: The SARSAT program leadership has transitioned from NOAA to the Coast Guard as of September 1, with Layne Carter as program manager. The Coast Guard is developing processes and meeting structures to support the program.

o. Recommendation to IMO MSC that all mariners carry PLBs: Ed Thiedeman reported that the USCG submitted an INF paper to NCSR 12 to discuss the various types of maritime survivor locating devices (MSLD) available in the market, their capabilities and limitations, and provides guidance to support the selection and voluntary carriage of MSLDs, which include man overboard (MOB) devices as well as personal locator beacons (PLB). The Coast Guard is preparing a paper to IMO MSC to advocate voluntary carriage of personal locator beacons and maritime survivor locating devices, building on the INF paper to NCSR 12.

p. MSLDs: Ed Thiedeman reported that SC119 had completed a revision to its standard on MSLDs and RTCM standard 11901 had been submitted to the FCC in a petition for rulemaking.

q. Aqua Alert Bill in Congress for Relaying MSI Alerts to Cell Phones That Register for the Voluntary Service: Aqua Alert, a public notification system for missing persons in the water, is operational in Long Island Sound and the Eastern Great Lakes, with plans to expand to Los Angeles/Long Beach. The pilot will run for a year, after which the Coast Guard will make recommendations to Congress.

r. TITAN MBI: Joe Hersey introduced the USCG Marine Board of Investigation into the TITAN submersible incident. He noted that recommendation #13 on page 326 says the Coast Guard should pursue a new requirement mandating enhanced communications capabilities for all submarines and submersibles that conduct commercial and scientific operations. Ed Thiedeman offered some of the technology solutions that are already out there and used by submarine services. They have the CPIRB, which is an EPIRB that is connected by a tether, released by the submarine, floats to the surface, activates, and it could provide a voice communications capability if fitted that way. In a similar manner, a deployable VHF communications buoy could be deployed in an emergency that floats to the surface and is connected by a tether and provides that capability. The last item currently in use is acoustic communications methods. These have been used for decades. This issue will ultimately fall under carriage requirement regulations. CG SAR, however, was tasked on this action item in the USCG review of the MBI. This item will be retained pending further action by the USCG or FCC.

10. MMSI WG and related issues: Joe Hersey noted that the MMSI WG had been held on 6 August and would next meet on 17 December 2025. The following are being considered by this group:

a. MMSI Management: Registered MMSI data from FCC, ITU and all licensed-by-rule providers except Sea Tow are now being accepted by USCG MISLE (Marine Information for Safety and Law Enforcement) at least on a weekly basis. Federal MMSIs have been provided to the USCG by NTIA by spreadsheet, but that data has not been added into MISLE. USCG MMSIs are also not being updated in MISLE.

b. MMSI reset: RTCM SC101 draft Standard 10160.*0 Procedures for the Resetting of Own-Ship Maritime Mobile Service Identities (MMSIs) on DSC Marine Radios, and Setting and Resetting Static Data on Automatic Identification Systems (AIS)* was approved back in July for an MMSI reset. There's an NMEA 2000 PGN that goes with it. Awaiting that to be approved by NMEA in October timeframe and hopefully the RTCM standard with the PGN in it will be published in November. That should go a long way in making it easier for users to reset their MMSI without having to send the radio back to the manufacturer. Standard Horizon and Icom have already included this feature in new models of their radios. Currently approximately 60%

of DSC distress calls received by the USCG have an unregistered or false MMSI. This standard should help to reduce that percentage.

c. US Power Squadrons incorporation of Sea Tow-registered MMSIs: USPS is now ready to proceed assuming MMSI registered data and is arranging a meeting with the USCG to ensure that data submitted retains its integrity.

d. Amending MMSI registrations for devices that are stolen: There is a new page on the NAVCEN website that describes that process. That is now completed and will be DELETED from the agenda.

e. MMSI impact on AIS navigation displays: The MMSI working group and RTCM SC129 have been studying the effect AIS devices having duplicate MMSIs will have on shipboard AIS displays. AIS SARTs, particularly those used on man-overboard devices, and AIS mobile ATONs developed by RTCM SC121 may exhibit this problem. In reviewing the duplicate MMSI problem, it was also found that AIS used on search and rescue aircraft in which the 7th digit of its MMSI equal to zero will likely not be seen on ship's AIS displays. The USCG brought both these problems to the attention of the ITU-R, requesting they also notify IEC. The issue has been passed to IEC TC80 for inclusion when the navigation standard is updated. IEC TC80 meets in October to decide on its NAV display standard. IEC is currently proposing to put that review off until 2029. Accordingly, this item will be DELETED from the agenda pending future action.

f. MMSIs for AIS used on autonomous vessels: The FCC has issued a notice on registering MMSIs for AIS used on autonomous vessels. There is currently no field in the MMSI for autonomous vessels and there is no field in the AIS report messages to identify whether a vessel is autonomous. Joe Hersey noted that it may be discussed in November at ITU. Kathleen Curameng described recent FCC and Coast Guard notices encouraging autonomous vessels to use AIS and obtain MMSI numbers, with guidance provided on the process depending on vessel type.

11. Satellite systems: Ed Thiedeman provided a brief report on COSPAS-SARSAT from the Joint Committee meeting in June. C/S is operating 3 constellations of satellites, the LEO, the GEO and the MEO. There are multiple GEOS, of which the US is operating 2. Of the MEO satellites, Galileo has a full constellation of 24 satellites. The US GPS constellation has 24 what are called DAS satellites. They are an S band payload, not the future L band payload. With regard to the L band payloads, US has delivered 6 SAR GPS repeaters to US Space Force for integration onto the GPS 3F satellite series, and the first of those should launch in 2026 on the current schedule. The LEO constellation status: C/S did have 5 LEO satellites in orbit until recently. Now there are only two. Three of the US satellites had to be taken offline due to age. One of them failed in orbit before it could be taken offline. The second one failed while being taken offline, and the third one was also taken offline. Before they failed, however, all those satellites operated for a minimum of 18 years. No other reports were available on satellite systems.

12. FCC Reports: The FCC provided guidance on the waiver process for equipment not meeting current Part 80 standards, discussed recent notices related to autonomous vessels and MMSI requirements, and encouraged direct communication with the FCC for regulatory assistance.

a. Waiver of Rules to allow use of IEC Standard for MOB in the U.S: The FCC reported that parties seeking to use equipment not compliant with Part 80 standards should consult regulatory counsel and submit a waiver request via the FCC's ECFS website, referencing 47 CFR 1.925, and send a courtesy copy to the maritime inbox for tracking. Participants were advised to contact Katie Knox, Kathleen Curameng, or the maritime@fcc.gov inbox for assistance with regulatory questions or waiver submissions.

b. Part 80 Standards: The FCC recommended that before engaging in the waiver filing process for equipment that does not meet Part 80, regulatory counsel is obtained. Submission of a waiver via FCC's ECFS website in accordance with 47 CFR 1.925 is required as part of that package and it is requested that a courtesy copy of the ECFS submission is sent to the maritime inbox, maritime@fcc.gov just to ensure visibility of the request and that it will be met in a timely manner.

c. Notice Advising Inspectors Public Notice: The FCC advised the TF on two notices, one was a petition by RTCM to address or update the standards of Part 95. That is rulemaking 12004 and can be accessed through ECFS. The second one in July 2025 Coast Guard issued an MSIB on autonomous vessels in US waters and encouraged these to be visible when underway. These vessels are encouraged to use AIS. FCC issued a public notice notifying the maritime community that if you do use AIS, you are required to obtain an MMSI number.

d. AIS Fishnet Markers: Regarding the status within FCC of AIS fishnet markers, there was nothing new to report.

13. Reports from other Governmental and International Agencies:

a. NOAA/National Weather Service: Darin Figurskey reported on the potential discontinuation of Coast Guard HF weather broadcasts due to low feedback, ongoing coordination with the Coast Guard, and the continued popularity of NAVTEX and other forecast products. Mariners making use of HF weather broadcasts should report such use to NOAA or to RTCM for relay to NOAA. RTCM emails are GMDSSTF@rtcm.org and info@rtcm.org.

b. Committee on the Marine Transportation System: Ed Wendlandt noted that RTCM is working on a liaison statement with CMTS. He also noted the Director of CMTS needed to be added to the TF distribution list

c. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA): Don Meyer noted that NGA is updating its S124 data sets and Radio Nav Aids publication, transitioning large tables to a web app for easier access, with public release expected within six months.

d. NTSB: Nothing to report.

e. Transport Canada: Alexander Lavoie noted that he had taken a new role with the Transportation Safety Board and was no longer with Transport Canada. Glenn Coady noted that he had spoken with Alex Leduc regarding a replacement for Alexander Lavoie. It was suggested to add Alex Leduc to the TF for the Canadian maritime issues until a replacement is in place.

f. CIRM: Ed Wendlandt noted that the CIRM Conference is coming up the week of 13 October in Lisbon, the week prior to IEC TC80's Plenary meeting.

14. **Review Summary Record of 8 May 2024 and Continuing Work List.** The summary record of the previous Task Force meeting is posted on the Task Force website. The Continuing Work Program is appended to each agenda and updated as needed.

15. **Next Meeting of the GMDSS Task Force:** The Task Force will next meet, virtually, on 8 January 2026, 1000-1230 EST. The draft agenda for the next meeting will be posted in the What's New section of www.rtcm.org once it is available. Ed Wendlandt also noted the 2026 RTCM Annual Assembly will be held the week of 4 May in Ft. Lauderdale, FL.

GMDSS TASK FORCE CONTINUING WORK LIST

10 September 2025

1. Monitor FCC continuing action to update GMDSS Rules (TF)
2. Recommend actions to reduce false alerts in GMDSS systems (TF)
3. Monitor Coast Guard Port State GMDSS inspection program (TF)
4. Monitor programs that broadcast MSI for GMDSS Standards conformance (TF)
5. Review GMDSS Internet Web Sites and update Task Force portion of NAVCEN site (TF)
6. Support SOLAS Working Group planning for IMO NCSR and Joint Experts meetings (TF)
7. Advocate voluntary carriage of VHF and EPIRB/PLBs by all vessels offshore (TF)
8. Monitor FCC policy and practice on MMSI assignments (TF)
9. Monitor non-GMDSS systems: AIS, LRIT, SSAS, VDES, VMS, & E-Navigation (TF)
10. Recommend means to improve Distress Alerts by Cell Phone & Internet (TF)
11. Advocate mandatory Distress Beacons on R/V more than 3 miles offshore (TF)
12. Advocate use of the Alaska AIS Monitor Network for VHF Distress Guard (TF)
13. Monitor Developments in Cybersecurity and educate membership (TF)
14. Advocate Earliest Fitting of AIS on Coast Guard Helicopters (TF)
15. Review GMDSS concepts and make modernization recommendations (MOD)
16. Monitor automatic response to test calls to USCG HF Commstas (CV)
17. Recommend Safety Radio and VMS Requirements for Small Fishing Vessels (CV)
18. Recommend Safety Radio & Navigation Requirements for Towing Vessels (CV)
19. Recommend Safety Radio & Navigation Outfit for Small Passenger Vessels (CV)
20. Advocate better FCC & USCG management of annual GMDSS inspections (CV)
21. Maintain Inspection Guidelines and Check Lists for selected vessel types (CV)
22. Advocate voluntary training programs for users of GMDSS systems (RV)
23. Encourage GMDSS handbooks and Internet and video training aids (RV)
24. Encourage users of VHF-DSC to Register for MMSI and connect GPS (RV)
25. Encourage Mfrs to upgrade readability of GMDSS items in equipment manuals (SA)
26. Recommend proper interconnection of GPS receivers with DSC Radios (SA)
27. Coordinate with USCG-NMC and FCC on training uniformity (TR)
28. Maintain GMDSS Question Pools for FCC and Coast Guard Examinations (TR)

Key to cognizant groups:
(TF) Task Force
(CV) Commercial Vessel Task Group
(RV) Recreational Vessel Task Group
(SA) Service Agents and Manufacturers Task Group
(TR) Training Task Group
(MOD) GMDSS Modernization Task Group

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