



# Get Connected for Rescue

## Some information about DSC Radios and the GMDSS

Many boaters with Digital Selective Calling (DSC) radios think they can just push the red “Distress” button on the front to call for help in an emergency. However, **most boaters with DSC radios haven't registered the radios to get a Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number and haven't connected them to their GPS.** In fact, a recent review of Search and Rescue (SAR) cases involving Digital Selective Calling (DSC) radios reveals that 90% of the cases lacked the accurate position information that could have been provided automatically if GPS were connected to the radio

To the recreational boater, **the MMSI number is the Caller ID for their boat.** Even if the radio is not connected to a GPS, **the MMSI number will enable the Distress Alert function of the DSC radio (the Red Button)** to send out a call for help on channel 70. This Alert will be heard by nearby boats and provide a text Alert message to the Coast Guard. This message will include the boat's MMSI number and that will enable the Coast Guard to identify: owners name, address, vessel name and characteristics, emergency contact, and homeport. As usual, the Coast Guard will respond to the vessel in distress by radio and work to identify its position.

**If the radio is connected to the GPS, the vessel's position will be transmitted during the Distress Alert.** This will give the Coast Guard an accurate location of the distress and may allow nearby vessels to assist. It will greatly increase the likelihood of rescue.

Although the great technology of these radios can “take the Search out of Search and Rescue”, it does boaters little good if it's not been implemented correctly.

Here are the **three steps** that recreational boaters need to accomplish to make the Distress Alert function work:

1. **Register** the radio to obtain an MMSI number. (It's free and can be done online.)
2. **Program** that number into the radio. (The DSC radio Distress Alert features will not work without the MMSI number programmed into the radio.)
3. **Connect** the DSC radio to the GPS. (They may need the help of a qualified technician to do this.)

If boaters take those three steps, help will come quickly when they push the red “Distress” button. If they don't take those three steps, it's likely that help will be delayed. And that could cost lives.

Here's what Auxiliarists can do to help:

**Vessel Examiners** – When performing a VSC, please ask the boat owner if they have a DSC radio. If they don't yet, suggest that they consider one. If they do have a DSC radio, ask them if they have an MMSI number programmed into their radio and if the radio is connected to the GPS. If the answer to either of those is "no", please explain why it would be in their best interests to complete those steps.

**Public Education Instructors** – When conducting PE classes, please take a moment to explain the importance of connecting the DSC radio to the GPS and of obtaining an MMSI number.

**Surface Operations Crews** – When you interact with boaters on the water or in the marina, please take a moment to ask them if they have a DSC radio. If they do, ask if they have an MMSI number programmed into it and if they have connected the radio to their GPS. If not, encourage them to do so by reminding them that it could save their life or the lives of their family.

In the coming days, we will post additional information on DSC radios and the GMDSS (the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System - the worldwide system that makes it easier to rescue distressed ships, boats and aircraft) on our website. We will also post links to technical information that may be of help to boaters who want to connect their radios GPS units. We encourage you to learn more about the GMDSS, DSC radios and the many features they have.

**Here are links to obtain an MMSI number:**

<http://www.boatus.com/mmsi/instruct.htm>

[http://www.seatow.com/boating\\_safety/mmsi.asp](http://www.seatow.com/boating_safety/mmsi.asp)

<http://www.usps.org/php/mmsi/home.php>

Here are some links to more information about GMDSS and DSC radios:

<http://www.boatus.com/mmsi/default.asp>

<http://www.boatus.com/foundation/dsc/player.html>

<http://vimeo.com/6539272>

<http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=GMDSS>

Thank you for helping to Get Connected for Rescue.

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