

MMSI stands for **Maritime Mobile Service Identity**.

An MMSI number is a series of nine digits which are used by maritime digital selective calling (**DSC**), automatic identification systems (**AIS**) and certain other equipment to uniquely identify a ship (radio) or a coast radio station and are sent in digital form over VHF radio channel 70.

The first three digits of your MMSI, (always starting with a number from 2 to 7) are assigned regionally, world-wide, with the United States currently having 338, 366, 367, 368 and 369, as our prefix.

Maritime Mobile Service Identities (MMSIs) numbers MMSIs are regulated and managed internationally by the [International Telecommunications Union](#) in Geneva, Switzerland, just as radio call signs are regulated.

If you only plan to operate your recreational vessel in U.S. waters, obtaining and registering an MMSI number for your VHF radio is free (and relatively easy) and can be provided by an organization such as BOAT US, SEA TOW and U.S. Power Squadron. The information you need at hand to obtain your MMSI number is:

- Your name, address, phone number and email address
- Name of primary emergency contact number and phone number
- Name of alternate contact ashore and phone number
- Vessel/operator cell phone
- Ship classification, Registration or Document number
- Vessel description (length, type, color, etc.)

Owners of vessels required to have FCC ship station licenses, including US flagged pleasure craft making international voyages, must obtain their MMSIs directly from the Federal Communications Commission.

VHF handhelds used in the United States should use the MMSI assigned to the ship to which the handheld is primarily associated, even if another radio on that ship uses the same MMSI.

The U.S. Coast Guard offers VHF and MF/HF radiotelephone service to mariners as part of the [Global Maritime Distress and Safety System](#) (**GMDSS**). This service, called digital selective calling (**DSC**), allows mariners to instantly send an automatically formatted distress alert to the Coast Guard or other rescue authority anywhere in the world. Digital selective calling also allows mariners to initiate or receive distress, urgency, safety and routine radiotelephone calls to or from any similarly equipped

vessel or shore station. DSC acts like the dial and bell of a telephone, allowing you to "direct dial" and "ring" other radios, or allow others to "ring" you, without having to listen to a speaker. Most VHF radios manufactured after 2000 have DSC capability.

Digital distress calls contain the MMSI, latitude, longitude, and time of fix. This way, rescue authorities automatically know

- who you are
- where you are
- when you are there

This saves valuable time in validating the emergency and deploying search and rescue assets. High seas rescues that used to take days now take hours or even minutes thanks to this system.

\*The Coast Guard urges, in the strongest terms possible, that you take the time to interconnect your GPS and DSC-equipped radio. Doing so may save your life in a distress situation!

If you have VHF-DSC, the MMSI can also be used for routine hailing. MMSI automated hailing offers many benefits such as automatic negotiation of working channels, group hailing, and reduced congestion on calling channels. Once the MMSI call is made on VHF channel 70 (70 is for digital transmission only, no voice traffic) the radios will automatically switch to the predetermined (by the caller) VHF channel for voice traffic.

**Interconnection to a GPS Receiver** - If your VHF doesn't have GPS built in, you will have to connect it to your GPS/Chart Plotter, in order for it to be able to transmit your position automatically.

All DSC-equipped radios, and most GPS receivers, have an NMEA 0183 two-wire data protocol capability. That NMEA protocol allows any model of GPS to be successfully interconnected to any model of radio, regardless of manufacture. Although NMEA has no standard for the type of cable or connector used, many if not most DSC and GPS receiver manufactures generally use plain stranded wire or ribbon cable with no connectors. These wires are simply connected between the radio and the GPS.

Before interconnecting your radio & GPS consult the owner's manuals. Instructions for which wires to connect on both units will be detailed in the owners or installation manual.

Due to FCC regulations, all DSC marine radios have a maximum of 1, 2 or 3 attempts to enter your MMSI number correctly. After the maximum number of attempts, the radio locks up and prohibits any further attempts. To reset the radio it must be sent in to the service center.