

Global Marine Distress and Safety System (GMDSS)

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The GMDSS is a major update of the international rules and equipment requirements governing safety radio equipment, which has been required on large ships since 1 February 1999. Recreational vessels are not required to participate in GMDSS but will find that traditional maritime radio systems are being upgraded to include automated watch standing and calling services on large vessels and on the Coast Guard shore radio networks. [GMDSS](#) is being implemented globally including coastal regions and port areas.

Marine VHF radio is the primary GMDSS system used by recreational vessels. Citizen Band Radio and Cellular phones are not part of GMDSS and use of those systems will not change. Cellular phones have a place on board and provide an added measure of safety. However, the Coast Guard does not advocate cellular phones as a substitute for the VHF maritime radio system. VHF maritime radios were designed with safety in mind. If you are in distress, your call can be received not only by the Coast Guard but also by other ships that may be in the vicinity. A VHF radio also helps ensure reception of storm warnings and other urgent marine information broadcasts which are announced by the Coast Guard on VHF Channel 16. Timely receipt of these broadcasts may save your life. Coast Guard vessels and aircraft can home on your VHF signals to help locate you. Additionally, your VHF marine radio can be used anywhere in the United States and overseas.