

Outside VHF Range

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The Very High Frequency-Frequency Modulation (VHF-FM) marine radio is basically a line of sight device. Its range is highly dependent on antenna height. Thus, when you are well offshore, you cannot contact the Coast Guard using a VHF radio. You have to use a Single Side Band High Frequency (SSB-HF) radio.

It is important to note that the Coast Guard discontinued monitoring the SSB-HF frequency of 2182 KHz several years ago. Nevertheless, many mariners continue to attempt to contact the Coast Guard using this frequency. Also, many mariners attempt to contact the Coast Guard using their EPIRBs, cell phones, SAT phones, and even NOAA weather electronics. Each of these communications devices has its own limitations and specific functional capabilities. Side Band High Frequency Radio SSB-HF communications offer a greater transmission range when other options are not available.

SSB-HF radios equipped with digital selective calling (DSC) are capable of triggering an alert at [Coast Guard Communications Command](#) and are an especially reliable means for initiating communications with the Coast Guard during distress situations. The Coast Guard keeps watch on the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) SSB-HF frequencies 4125, 6215, 8291 and 12,290 kHz in place of the old international radiotelephone distress frequency 2182 kHz.

More detailed information on the SSB-HF and HF DSC frequencies on which the Coast Guard keeps watch for distress and safety purposes are listed here:

<https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=cgcommsCall>. Questions or comments concerning Coast Guard HF distress, safety and broadcast services may be sent to the Coast Guard Communications Command at: COM-DG-M-CWOWatchstanders@uscg.mil.