

Use of VHF Recreational Marine Radio

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Do you have a VHF marine radio on your boat when you go out? You definitely should! The primary purpose of a VHF marine radio is safety, your safety plus the other people on board, other boaters, and marinas nearby. Cell Phones don't always have signal and what is the cell number for the coast guard anyway. Your VHF radio will get you the fastest response to help.

Channel use is important. Channel 16 remains the primary channel to send and listen for distress broadcasts. The United States Coast Guard (USCG) requires all boaters monitor channel 16 when on the water, and to provide aid in a distress situation. Keep in mind when using Channel 16 that all conversations are recorded by the USCG. Channel 9 is also used as the hailing channel, in some areas there is a lot of communication happening and this allows more options when there is a distress situation. Channel 22 is used for the Coast Guard operations, vessels in distress, and in addition to notices to mariners.

When you need to communicate to bridges, for example, when you need to request an opening, channel 13 is what the bridge tender is listening on.

Recreational marine channels 68, 69, 71 and 72 for communication among boaters. If you are new to using a VHF radio, I suggest keeping a channel chart at the helm when on the water. Many VHF radios have a dual watch / triple watch feature to monitor Channel 16 for emergencies and 9 for hailing and in triple watch, another channel of your choice. An excellent feature.

There is also a channel 16 button on the radio console and/or microphone; use this button to switch to channel 16 quickly to broadcast, especially a "Mayday" call when having or seeing an emergency.

I strongly recommend learning all you can about the features that come with your VHF Radio. These radio features when used save time plus dramatically improve communication and safety. Many VHF radios have built in GPS or can pair with the boats GPS, this allows you to communicate your GPS location when you need help.

One advanced feature you should learn is Digital Selective Calling, DSC for direct boat-to-boat calling and for making a distress call. This feature greatly improves the information and who is contacted as quickly as possible. Boaters register their radio plus other information with the FCC. The FCC returns a Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number. This number identifies the boat's radio, boat description and owner. The boater

enters their MMSI number into the radio allowing the coast guard more information about the boat and the owner. When making a distress call with DSC it automatically increases power, identifies the radio hence boat and owner to the Coast Guard and all vessels within reach.

To hail another boat directly via DSC is also worth learning about, by programing another boater's MMSI number into your radio you can set them up just like a speed dial number in your phone. Using this feature, you can hail that boater directly, they then will respond on their radio and you have direct communication without using channel 16 or 9.

This article is given the courtesy of your local America's Boating Club of the Pamlico. A 2-1/2 hour seminar, **All about FHF-DSC Marine Radio**, is being offered September 26th. To register or learn more information contact Kelly at pspsed@gmail.com. We also invite you to visit our website at <https://pamlicosailandpowersquadron.org> to learn about more boating safety and education.