

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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National Marine Electronics Association
Attn: David A. Hayden
President/Executive Director
7 Riggs Avenue
Severna Park, MD 21146

Dear Mr. Hayden,

I request your help resolving a safety problem we have begun experiencing during our build-out of the Rescue 21 VHF distress system. Of the roughly one hundred digital selective calling (DSC) distress alerts we are now receiving each month, approximately nine out of ten do not have position information (i.e. do not have a GPS navigation receiver interconnected to their DSC-equipped VHF radio), and approximately six out of ten have not registered their Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI). Despite the promises DSC technology offers in significantly reducing the alerting and search time for mariners in distress, there's little a Coast Guard watchstander can do after receiving a distress alert with no position information, using an unregistered MMSI, and having no follow-up voice communications.

While both the MMSI registration and VHF radio / GPS interconnect problem can be addressed by public outreach, the VHF radio / GPS interconnect problem cannot be resolved absent a technological solution. While all DSC-equipped radios are required to have an NMEA 0183 interface and most boaters are understood to carry GPS receivers also having an NMEA 0183 interface, most radios remain unconnected from the GPS. Given that many if not most radios designed for the recreational market provide that interface by use of a pigtail without a connector and that many boaters must remove their radios after each docking to keep it from being stolen, it's not surprising that few interconnect their radios to an existing GPS receiver. Encouraging manufacturers to fit integral GPS receivers on VHF radios marketed to boaters or to fit NMEA 2000 interconnections on radios and GPS units might also be solutions.

I request the NMEA 0183 standards committee address this interconnect problem as a matter of urgency and consider revising their standard as appropriate. I further ask that you assist us in reaching out to the manufacturers of VHF radios and GPS receivers marketed to the recreational boating community and to marine electronics dealers to assist and advise recreational boaters on the interconnection of these devices, to encourage boaters to properly register MMSI identities, and to encourage manufacturers to quickly implement solutions to this problem. I will be asking our Research and Development Center, who participates in your NMEA 0183 standards committee, to assist in this endeavor. Finally, I request your help and that of your membership in encouraging recreational boaters who purchase VHF radios to properly register their MMSI information before using the radio, and to update that registration when necessary.

On behalf of the Coast Guard I wish to thank NMEA for assisting us not only in this matter, but for their long standing reputation and commitment in the development and use of marine electronics equipment in support of maritime safety and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Sincerely,



R.E. DAY
Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard
Assistant Commandant for Command, Control,
Communications, Computers & IT