



PUBLIC NOTICE

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FISHING VESSELS AND SMALL PASSENGER VESSELS IN CERTAIN AREAS MUST UPGRADE TO VHF DIGITAL SELECTIVE CALLING EQUIPMENT BY JANUARY 20, 2016

By this *Public Notice*, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau informs owners and operators of certain vessels that they must upgrade to VHF radiotelephone equipment that includes digital selective calling (DSC)¹ capability no later than January 20, 2016. Fishing vessels and small passenger vessels must be equipped with a VHF radiotelephone installation, which must have DSC capability beginning one year after the United States Coast Guard (USCG) notifies the Commission that shore-based Sea Area A1 coverage has been established.² On January 20, 2015, USCG notified the Commission that it had published a notice in the *Federal Register* declaring Sea Area A1 within twenty nautical miles seaward of the territorial baseline along the East, West, and Gulf coasts of the United States, excluding Alaska, and including Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands of the United States, and the Northern Mariana Islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.³ Consequently, fishing vessels and small passenger vessels operating in those waters must upgrade to VHF-DSC equipment no later than January 20, 2016.⁴

For further information, contact Tim Maguire of the Mobility Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, at (202) 418-2155, TTY (202) 418-7233, or via email at tim.maguire@fcc.gov.

¹ DSC is an internationally approved system for automatically contacting vessels. It allows mariners to instantly send an automatically formatted distress alert to rescue authorities anywhere in the world, and to initiate or receive distress, urgency, safety and routine radiotelephone calls to or from any similarly equipped vessel or shore station without either party being near a radio loudspeaker. DSC also allows ship and shore stations to call each other directly, rather than requiring a radio operator to continuously monitor a common calling channel to identify specific calls directed to the station.

² 47 C.F.R. §§ 80.905(a)(1), (a)(3), (a)(4), 80.1071(c). Sea Area A1 is an area within the radiotelephone coverage of at least one VHF coast station in which continuous DSC alerting is available. 47 C.F.R. § 80.1069(a)(1).

³ See Declaration of Sea Area A1, 80 Fed. Reg. 2722, 2723 (2015). This determination was based upon the performance of the USCG Rescue 21 System, and in accordance with applicable provisions of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974. Rescue 21 is the Coast Guard's advanced command, control and direction-finding communications system that was created to better locate mariners in distress. It is comprised of strategically placed VHF Coast stations that provide a continuous watch on DSC Channel 70 for receiving and responding to digital distress signals. In addition to declaring Sea Area A1 along the designated coasts, USCG informed mariners that the Rescue 21 System also provides VHF Coast Stations along the Great Lakes, and that Rescue 21 facilities are being built along the Western Rivers and in Alaska.

⁴ Vessels with a VHF-DSC radiotelephone must maintain a watch on DSC channel 70, see 47 C.F.R. 80.1085(a)(2), in addition to the radio watch requirements for channel 16 and for broadcasts of maritime safety information.

