



PUBLIC NOTICE

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WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS BUREAU BEGINS ISSUING MARITIME MOBILE SERVICE IDENTITIES (MMSI) FOR VHF HANDHELD RADIO

As of October 5, 2022, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau (Bureau) will expand the types of marine radios eligible to obtain Maritime Mobile Service Identities (MMSIs) to include VHF handheld radio transceivers. The Bureau already assigns MMSIs through its licensing process for ship and coast station radios, and now expands the process as a result of recently changed International Telecommunication Union (ITU) assignment policies.

An MMSI is a unique nine-digit number assigned to maritime ship and coast stations that use Digital Selective Calling (DSC) or Automatic Identification System (AIS) equipment.¹ For vessels, the MMSI functions as the “phone number” that allows DSC direct dialing.² Vessels participating in the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System are also required to program their MMSI into their AIS transponder.³ Search and rescue authorities, including the United States Coast Guard, may use the MMSI to find out background information about a vessel in distress, and to help determine whether an alert is false.

MMSIs have traditionally been assigned to vessels and coast stations, with the MMSI programmed into radio equipment that is intended to be permanently installed on a ship or coast station.⁴ The Commission assigns MMSIs to coast stations and individually licensed vessels as part of the licensing process.⁵ Operators of vessels that are licensed by rule—i.e., vessels that are not required to

¹ See 47 CFR § 80.103(b) (MMSI requirement for DSC); *id.* § 80.231(b) (MMSI requirement for AIS); *see also* *Wireless Telecommunications Bureau Reminds Mariners Regarding Correct Use of Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) Numbers*, Public Notice, 27 FCC Rcd 15260, 15260 (WTB 2012) (*MMSI Public Notice*).

² *FCC Seeks Comment Regarding Revision of Procedures for Assigning Maritime Mobile Service Identities*, Public Notice, 13 FCC Rcd 9177, 9177 (1997).

³ AIS is a maritime navigation safety communications system standardized by the International Telecommunication Union for use in collision avoidance and vessel monitoring and tracking. It employs on-board transponders, electronic charts, Differential Global Positioning System technology, and a technique called Self-Organizing Time Division Multiple Access (SOTDMA) to provide a VHF ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore radio service in which vessels and designated shore stations broadcast a unique identifier, coupled with safety-related data on, for example, ship positions, routes, dimensions, and navigational status. *See Amendment of the Commission’s Rules Regarding Maritime Automatic Identification Systems et al.*, WT Docket No. 04-344, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Notice of Proposed Rule Making, 19 FCC Rcd 20071, 20074 para. 5 (2004).

⁴ MMSIs may also be assigned to AIS Search and Rescue Transponders, AIS Maritime Survivor Locating Devices, and search and rescue aircraft.

⁵ *See MMSI Public Notice*, 27 FCC Rcd at 15260.

obtain an individual ship station license—can obtain MMSIs from private registration agents designated by the Commission and the Coast Guard.⁶

The ITU has expanded the authorized assignment of MMSIs to include VHF handheld radios used exclusively for maritime communications.⁷ Under the ITU’s new guidance, MMSIs may be assigned to maritime VHF handheld radios that have DSC capability and an integrated Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) receiver.⁸ The ITU specifies that “[t]he procedure and criteria for assignment and registration of these identities should be left to the administration concerned.”⁹

The Bureau has implemented a process to permit the issuance of VHF Handheld MMSIs to Commission licensees. To obtain an MMSI for a maritime VHF handheld radio from the Commission, follow the instructions below:

1. Applications must be filed electronically within the Commission’s [Universal Licensing System](#)⁹ (ULS). Log in using your FCC Registration Number (FRN)¹⁰ and password.
2. In the ULS License Manager menu, select “Apply for a New License.”
3. Select “SA-Ship” from the Radio Service menu.
4. Select “Portable” for Ship License Type.
5. Include an attachment requesting a Handheld VHF Formatted MMSI. If this step is not completed, a standard vessel-formatted MMSI will be issued.

For information on how to apply for a license in ULS, contact the ULS Help Desk at (877) 480-3201, or <https://www.fcc.gov/available-support-services>. For additional information about the Maritime Mobile Services, including Handheld VHF Formatted MMSIs, see <https://www.fcc.gov/vhf-handheld-stations>. For further information about this public notice, contact the following Mobility Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau staff: Katie Knox at (717) 338-2652, Katie.Knox@fcc.gov; Ghassan Khalek at (202) 418-0680, Ghassan.Khalek@fcc.gov; or Jeff Tobias at (202) 418-1617, Jeff.Tobias@fcc.gov (TTY available for all staff at (202) 418-7233).

By the Deputy Chief, Mobility Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau.

⁶ See, e.g., *Commission Announces Agreements with Shine Micro, Inc., and United States Power Squadrons, Inc., and Termination of Agreement with MariTEL, Inc., Regarding Assignment of Maritime Mobile Service Identities (MMSIs)*, Public Notice, 22 FCC Rcd 7329, 7329-30 (WTB MD 2007) (listing entities from which operators of vessels licensed by rule can obtain MMSIs, including Sea Tow Service International, Inc., which is no longer active). Vessel owners that allow their individual licenses to expire (because they no longer have to be licensed individually) may continue to use the FCC-issued MMSI, but must register it with a private registration agent. *MMSI Public Notice*, 27 FCC Rcd at 15261-62.

⁷ See ITU, Recommendation ITU-R M.585-9: Assignment and Use of Identities in Maritime Mobile Service at Annex 2 section 1 (May 3, 2022), https://www.itu.int/dms_pubrec/itu-r/rec/m/R-REC-M.585-9-202205-1!!PDF-E.pdf.

⁸ *Id.* The ITU has specified that an MMSI assigned to a VHF handheld radio must be in the format 8₁M₂I₃D₄X₅X₆X₇X₈X₉, where digits 2, 3 and 4 represents the MID and X is any figure from 0 to 9. The MID represents the administration assigning the identity to the handheld transceiver. *Id.* at 3.

⁹ *Id.* at 4.

¹⁰ See FCC, *Universal Licensing System*, <https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/universal-licensing-system>.

¹¹ An FRN may be acquired from the Commission Registration System, or CORES. FCC, *Commission Registration System for the FCC*, <https://www.fcc.gov/licensing-databases/commission-registration-system-fcc>.