



# Marine Safety Information Bulletin

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U.S. Coast Guard  
Inspections and Compliance Directorate  
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MSIB Number: 15-15  
Date: December 15, 2015  
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## VHF-DSC Radio Equipment Installation Requirement for Inspected Passenger and Commercial Fishing Vessels

On January 20, 2015, the Coast Guard notified the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that it had published a Federal Register notice declaring Sea Area A1<sup>1</sup> to be within twenty nautical miles seaward of the territorial baseline along the East, West, and Gulf coasts of the United States, excluding Alaska, but including Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands of the United States, and the Northern Mariana Islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.<sup>2</sup> This determination was made because the Coast Guard now has service, in Sea Area A1, under its Rescue 21 Distress System coverage. Consequently, and in accordance with the requirements of Title 47 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 80.905(a)(1), inspected passenger vessels that carry more than six passengers, with at least one for hire, and commercial fishing vessels of 300 gross tons and upward, operating in those waters, must upgrade to VHF-DSC<sup>3</sup> radio equipment beginning one year after notification or not later than **January 20, 2016**.

In accordance with references 46 CFR 121.502, 46 CFR 184.502 and 28 CFR 28.245, a vessel must comply with the applicable requirements for any radio installation, including the requirements for a station license and installation certificates to be issued by the FCC as set forth in 47 CFR Part 80. Vessels that operate solely within twenty nautical miles of land must be equipped with a radiotelephone installation that conform to the appropriate performance standards in § 80.1101(c)(2).

The FCC released a [Public Notice](#) (DA 15-466) on April 16, 2015 announcing this new requirement and questions concerning that notice may be directed to Mr. Tim Maguire of the Mobility Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau at (202) 418-2155, or [Tim.Maguire@FCC.gov](mailto:Tim.Maguire@FCC.gov).

Questions concerning this notice may be directed to the Office of Commercial Vessel Compliance, Commandant (CG-CVC) at 202-372-1251 or [CG-CVC-1@uscg.mil](mailto:CG-CVC-1@uscg.mil).

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<sup>1</sup> Sea Area A1 is an area within the radio coverage of at least one VHF Coast Station in which continuous DSC alerting is available as defined by 47 CFR § 80.1069(a)(1).

<sup>2</sup> 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, the 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. *See Declaration of Sea Area A1, 80 Fed. Reg. 2722, 2723 (2015)*.

<sup>3</sup> 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 the specific caller.