

Q & A about VHF Digital Selective Calling

QUESTION - What happens if, after putting out a DSC distress call one is unable to respond when contacted on 16 ?

ANSWER - If you get a voice call back on Ch 16 after pressing the Red DSC Distress button (for > 5 sec) and you can't or don't respond, the USCG and other boats in the vicinity who receive your DSC Distress Alert should try to come to your location. USCG most probably will send available forces to your location and issue an All Stations alert on Ch 16 as they try to verify your whereabouts with someone ashore who is listed as a point of contact on the registration form you filled out to get your MMSI. It is unlikely that USCG will initiate a full SAR (Search & Rescue) effort without some verification that your DSC Distress Alert was legitimate

Here is a list of DSC (Digital Selective Calling) points that apply to this scenario:

- Your new radio will not send a DSC Distress Alert if your MMSI (Maritime Mobile Service Identity) number has not been entered.
- Your new radio will not send your position as part of the DSC Distress Alert until a GPS is wired/connected to your radio
- The DSC Distress Alert that your radio automatically sends when you press the Red DSC Distress button contains your boat's MMSI, your GPS location and the nature of your distress, if you have entered one (I keep mine set to "MOB" just in case the person that presses the button isn't able/doesn't have time to select something from the list on each radio)
- Your DSC Distress Alert will be heard on every vessel (that has a DSC capable radio) and shore station within VHF range, which is up to about 50 miles for digitalized signals
- This means that an alarm, like the one demonstrated at the Ft Schuyler Safety Seminar, will sound on every vessel and shore station until a person turns it off (by touching any key on their radio)
- That alarm will sound even if the volume on the receiving radio is turned down, as long as the radio is on.
- When a person on another boat or station turns off the alarm - the display on their DSC capable radio will show them your MMSI and your GPS position, plus the nature of your distress (MOB in my case)
- The DSC Distress Alert automatically repeats itself every four minutes until another vessel or coast station (USCG) acknowledges receipt electronically, or you turn it off.
- You can stop the continuous transmission of a DSC Distress Alert by following the instructions on your radio's display or by turning your radio off, then back on
- Finally, when someone calls you back on Ch 16 - they will probably call using your MMSI nine digit number, not your boat name (*CARINA*). That's why I recommend that you post your MMSI number above the radio(s) on your boat.
- The USCG probably will call your boat name, "*CARINA*", after they find your MMSI registration information in the national data base
- Other vessels that have your MMSI entered into their radio's DSC Directory will also know your boat's name.
- For more information about VHF DSC operations see www.cruisingclub.org or ask rontrossbach@msn.com.