



NETHERLANDS COASTGUARD (JRCC Den Helder)

NEWSLETTER nr. 37E (August 2004)

Radio Watch on VHF channel 16

On the implementation of GMDSS it was considered to cease maintaining radio watch on VHF channel 16. To provide ships, exempted from GMDSS regulations, a possibility to initiate alarms on VHF channel 16, the Ministry of Transport and Public Works at that time decided to continue the radio watch on VHF channel 16 until february 1st 2005. This was in connection with the regulations of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

The extension of this transitional period was also meant to enable vessels, exempted from SOLAS Convention regulations (Safety Of Life At Sea), to make the necessary provisions in accordance with GMDSS regulations.

After several and elaborate discussions regarding radio watch on VHF channel 16 the Sub-committee on Radio Communications and Search and Rescue (COMSAR) of the IMO concluded that continuation of radio watch on board ships at sea is desirable.

It is therefore that the Directorate-General Freight Transport of the Ministry of Transport and Public Works decided to continue the radio watch on VHF channel 16 in The Netherlands, for the time being for an unlimited period, after February 1st 2005. The decision of other countries in this matter is unknown.

In spite of the above-mentioned decision The Netherlands Coastguard maintains its advice to seagoing yachtsmen to change over to GMDSS equipment. It is in their best interest to initiate alerts on VHF DSC channel 70 whenever the circumstances require doing so. Only in this way one stands a very good chance to be "heard".

Also the point of view concerning the use of mobile phones for distress, urgency and safety purposes is unaltered. The authorities for the following reasons disapprove of using mobile phones at sea for emergency and/or safety purposes:

- Coverage of inshore waters and at sea is not reliable.
- 1-1-2 telephone exchanges are not fitted to handle maritime distress traffic with priority.
- A telephone-link is a so-called closed circuit. Forwarding distress calls directly to the RCC by mobile phone eliminates the possibilities for other vessels in the vicinity to render assistance.
- Direct contact with SAR-units is not possible.
- The capacity of batteries often is insufficient for long term use.
- Determination by radio-bearings of mobile phones is not possible. This is not the case if VHF equipment is used.

VHF channel 16 may also be used as a calling frequency. After contact is established the conversation must be held on a working channel. The Netherlands Coastguard Centre urgently insists to use channel 16 as limited as possible for calling purposes. Conversations, other than distress-, urgency or safety traffic, are not allowed on channel 16.

Continuation of radio watch on VHF channel 16 shall only be in force for the responsibility area's of The Netherlands Coastguard, namely Dutch coastal waters, Waddenzee, IJsselmeer, Zuid Holland and Zeeland Estuaries. For all other inshore waters and canals the ruling regulations in respect of alerting will not change after 2005.

Newsletter 11E cancelled.

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or on our website: www.kustwacht.nl