

COASTALBOATING.NET

THE BOATER'S RESOURCE
FOR PLACES TO GO AND THINGS TO KNOW

[Home](#) [Homeport](#) [Cruising](#) [Resources](#) [Features](#) [Contact Us](#)

[Contact our editor](#)



Onyx appreciates your news, views, and updates!

Get update notifications on:
[facebook](#)



Nautical and other
[Classic Books](#)



2019 2nd edition
[Self-help for Experts and Authors](#)

VHF Radio Basics

- [Radio License Basics \(US\)](#)
- [Radio Watchkeeping Regulations](#)
- [U.S. VHF Channels and Frequencies](#)
- [International Vhf Marine Radio Channels and Frequencies](#)

Radio Protocol and Etiquette

Every channel on VHF radio has a specific purpose. Channel 16 is for hailing and distress messaging only. It is meant to be monitored all the time while underway to assist in emergencies if necessary, to hear Coast Guard alerts for weather and hazards or restrictions to navigation, and to hear another vessel hailing you. This channel should never be used for casual conversation or performing a radio check. Please keep in mind that you could (without even knowing it) be preventing someone from reaching help in a disaster.



Channel 16 is for hailing or distress calls only. You may not chat on channel 16. Use 9 or a working channel.

Obscene or objectionable language, transmission of music, and subversive transmissions are forbidden. There are individuals monitoring the airwaves and the Coast Guard can locate the origins of signals. The consequences can be severe. Children should be taught proper radio use and should never be left unattended near a radio.

To hail another vessel, simply call the name of the vessel two or three times, followed by your own vessel's name and station ID if applicable. Wait for a response then immediately switch to a working channel. For example, depress the microphone key and say "Seascape, Seascape, Seascape, this is Espresso WDA9048 on channel 16, over." You must release the key to hear a response. The term "over" let's the listeners know you are releasing the key. The response might be, "Espresso, this is Seascape. Switch channel 68, over." Espresso would answer, "Espresso switching 68." Both vessels switch their radios to 68, hail each other and converse normally. At the end of the conversation, "Espresso returning to stand by channel 16," or "Seascape out." The term "out" signifies that you are terminating the conversation. Never say "over and out." Those are conflicting terms.

All ships should maintain watch on channel 16 (156.800 MHz) when within the service area of a VHF maritime coast station and while at sea. Ships with digital selective calling-equipped VHF marine radios should also keep watch on channel 70. After February 1, 2005 ships over 300 tons and passenger ships will no longer be required to monitor channel 16 but will be required under international law to monitor channel 70 for DSCSS signals.

Vessels not required to carry a marine radio (e.g. recreational vessels less than 20m length), but which voluntarily carry a radio, must maintain a watch on channel 16 whenever the radio is operating and not being used to communicate. Such vessels may alternatively maintain a watch on VHF channel 9 (156.450 MHz), the boater calling channel. Note however that

If you like our work, please

[Donate](#)



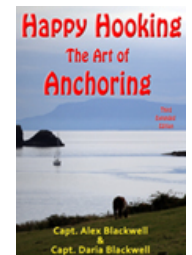
NauticEd

[Sailing Courses](#)

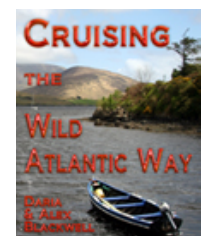
Web hosting in Ireland:



[Nautical Books](#)



Amazon Bestseller
2019, 3rd Edition
[Click here for more info](#)



- [Top SSB/HAM Radio Frequencies](#)
- [Radio Etiquette](#)
- [VHF with DSC](#)
- [Buy or sell a boat with DSC](#)

Related Stories

- [Anchoring Etiquette](#)
- [Dockside Etiquette](#)
- [Flag Etiquette](#)
- [Burgee Etiquette](#)
- [Personal Signals](#)
- [Radio Etiquette](#)
- [Dinghy Etiquette](#)

urgent marine information broadcasts, such as storm warnings, are announced on channel 9 only in First CG District waters (northern New Jersey, New York and New England). Only Channel 16 is used as the international hailing and distress frequency.

U.S. vessels required to carry a VHF marine radio, such as commercial fishing vessels, **must** maintain a watch on channel 16 (156.800 MHz) while underway whenever the radio is not being used for exchanging communications. Every power-driven vessel of 20m length or greater, every vessel of 100 tons and upward carrying one or more passengers for hire, every towing vessel of 26 ft length or greater, and every dredge and floating plant near a channel or fairway, **must** maintain a watch on **both** VHF channels 13 (156.650 MHz) and 16 (156.800 MHz) while the vessel is underway.

Basics for radio etiquette and protocol include:

- Always monitor channel 16 while



Our little friend learns how to use the radio properly by hailing a launch on channel 71, a working channel.

underway. Reserve calling on channel 16 for hailing and distress only. If you need to hail a vessel, name the vessel you are calling two or three times, state the name of your vessel and wait. Once the vessel responds, switch immediately to an authorized working channel. (See list.)

- Example: "*Vectis, Vectis, Vectis, this is Aleria on channel 16 over.*" "*Aleria this is Vectis.*" "*Vectis, switch to channel 71.*" "*Vectis switching 71.*" You meet on channel 71 where you can converse normally.
- The reason to state the channel you are on is that very often people monitor two (dual) or more frequencies and may have forgotten to switch back to 16 after a previous transmission.
- Conduct radio checks on channel 9. This is a hailing frequency for non-commercial and non-emergency traffic.
- Hail commercial vessels on channel 13 if you need to verify their intentions. It's better to discuss a course of action with the captain of a tanker than to create a hazardous situation. Channel 13 is also the channel bridge tenders listen to. If you need to know when the next bridge opening would be, this is the channel on which to hail the bridge operator.
- Working channels for recreational boaters are 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, and 78a. These are also the channels used by many yacht clubs and marinas for their working channels. Use care not to "step on" or interfere with transmission involving yacht races and other events. Note that channel 70 is now authorized only for Digital Selective Calling, an emergency automated distress system mandated by international treaty; channel 70 may no longer be used for voice communication.

One additional rule to mind is that VHF radio is for use only on the water. Shore use is permitted only with a special land based radio permit which is what yacht clubs and marinas have which allows them to talk from the dock house to vessels on the water. If you go ashore with your handheld and you call someone aboard your vessel, you are in violation of the law. For that use, FRS two-way radios that now have suitable range for contact within several miles' radius are widely available and great for staying in touch with your shore crew.

They are also quite useful for communicating from above decks to below and bow to stern while anchoring. Some radios are now even available with VHF and FRS frequencies built in. Visit <http://www.navcen.uscg.gov> for up to date information about designated marine frequencies.

Please also keep in mind that the **Mayday call is only for situations in which life or property is in immediate danger**. It is not for calling for help if you've run out of fuel, unless you are in imminent danger (eg, in a channel without an anchor and without alternative propulsion about to go up on rocks). When you call mayday, you are setting the search and rescue operations into immediate action. If you run out of fuel, run aground, or have an engine problem that is not an immediate threat, hail your towing service or the local coast guard for referral to the local towing service. You may also consider issuing a securite warning to other vessels. If you perceive danger but it's either not identifiable or not imminent, you may issue a pan pan which gets everyone to listen up for further updates. So the sequence of radio distress calls is as follows:

Least threatening: Securite, securite, securite (you are towing someone and have restricted maneuverability and you want all others to avoid you or to let you know if there's a potential issue)

Moderately threatening: Pan pan, pan pan, pan pan (you have grounded and believe you may be taking on water slowly or are a hazard to navigation)

Immediate danger and distress: Mayday, mayday, mayday (your ship is going down, you've lost someone overboard, your vessel is being smashed on rocks, etc)

Note: On HAM radio frequencies, Break, Break, Break is the equivalent of Mayday, mayday, mayday. Never use the term "Break" three times unless there is immediate threat to life or property.

[CoastalBoating](#)

[White Seahorse](#)



Coastal Boating (Reg. in Ireland No. 443222) is a division of Knowledge Clinic Ltd.

Europe: Port Aleria, Rosnakilly, Kilmeena, Westport, Co. Mayo, Ireland - USA: PO Box 726, Mahwah, NJ 07430

All content on this site is subject to Copyright© - All rights reserved.

[Contact us](#) - [Advertising](#) - [Privacy](#) - [Terms & Conditions](#) - [Copyright & Trademark](#) - [Webmaster](#)