

# Are you listening?

This question is often asked of me by my first mate; but I'm asking you. It is a requirement for all vessels equipped with VHF radio equipment to be standing by on channel 16 at all times, unless you are actively communicating with another vessel on a working channel.

That being said it is difficult for a group of boats to travel together and have casual conversation or warn of debris in the water constantly calling on 16 and switching to a working channel. So many boaters stand by on the working channel and don't bother with 16. This situation is not acceptable in my mind. We travel through one of the busiest deep-sea ports in the world. Many very important radio calls regarding ship traffic not to mention mayday or pan-pan calls go unheard by the boater that leaves their radio on 96".

Now I am a bit of a radio nut, I have been an armature radio operator for many years so the VHF radio in our boat is another toy for me to play with when we are out on the water.

Here are some suggestions to get around the problem.

- Set your radio to scan in-between the working channel you are using and 16. This way you will hear most of the traffic on both channels. Your radio should kick out of scan mode when you key the mike to respond to any call.
- Use your hand held radio for monitoring Channel 16. The coast guard and vessel traffic control have very powerful stations with many transmitter locations. Any call made by these stations will be heard on your handheld. Any local vessels calling you on 16 will also be in the range of your handheld and the ship-to-ship calls off in the distance will not bother you.
- Go out and get yourself a class "D" DSC VHF radio and apply for your MMSI number. Connect it to your GPS (if you have one) this radio will add many comforts to your VHF usage.
  - Emergency positioning (sending and receiving)
  - Ship-to-ship calling without picking up the mike. It's like sending an email to the other vessel and asking them to meet you on a working channel only it's instant.
  - The ability to request a position or send a position directly to the display on your radio
  - The ability to broadcast to all ships hazards, notices, medical situations and many other menu options.
  - A group MMSI can be applied for and all the vessels in your yacht club or Squadron can be contacted and brought to a working channel with the push of a button.

The cost of a class "D" DSC radio is below \$300.00 is your safety and the safety of others worth less?

A final note the rule of thumb is use as little power as is necessary to maintain reliable communications. Using HIGH power ship to ship in the same area creates unnecessary chatter on the radio. When I am in Howe Sound I don't need to hear vessels in the Fraser River talking about the swing bridge out of service. Use low power until the station you are communicating with comments on your poor signal then switch to high. Your equipment will last longer and if you are under sail your batteries will last longer as well.

Keep your ears on, your power low and the "shiny side up"

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