

VHF RADIO REQUIREMENTS and GUIDANCE

The radio spectrum worldwide is governed by the International Radio Regulations. In the UK the associated legislation is the Wireless Telegraphy (WT) Act 2006 (as amended).

These regulations stipulate the licences that are required both for the radio installation and the radio operator. Although maritime (ship) radio's primary function is to ensure safety of life at sea, the international radio regulations permit the use of ship radio on inland waterways as well as at sea. The rules for the installation and use of radio (e.g. VHF) apply equally when the equipment is used inland.

Base stations:

A yacht club wishing to operate a base station, on channel M, M2 and 80, will require a Coastal Station Radio (CSR) Marina Licence which is intended for sailing or yacht clubs as well as commercial marinas and similar organisations. The Licence covers communications concerning the movement and berthing of pleasure craft and the control of races.

These three channels are available as a package and permit operation of a base station on channels M (157.850 MHz), M2 (161.425 MHz) and 80 (161.625/157.025 MHz). The Licence may also include authorisation to operate (e.g. quayside if necessary) a number of associated hand held VHF radio sets. However, if the hand held VHF radio has access to other international maritime channels, it will be necessary to obtain a Ship Portable Radio Licence (see below) for each associated hand held VHF set.

Any additional "private" (non-international) channel - covered by a CSR UK Licence will be charged individually at a considerably higher cost and may be considered only on a case by case basis.

Ofcom will not normally undertake frequency coordination between clubs or marinas on channels M, M2 or 80. As a guide, it is suggested that clubs use channel M2 as their first choice and Marinas use channel 80 as their first choice, with channel M being used as the second choice for both Clubs and Marinas.

Use of channels M & M2 does not require the user to hold a Maritime Radio Operator's Certificate and Authority to Operate as these frequencies are not in the international maritime VHF band. However, regular users should be encouraged to obtain the certificate of competence in radiotelephony, e.g. the Short Range Certificate (SRC) and if any other channels are available on the set the SRC is required.

Channel 80 is an international channel and it may only be used by or under the direct supervision of someone holding a relevant Maritime Radio Operator's Certificate and Authority to Operate.

The CSR Licence will state that Channel 80 is available, but it would be best for the radio not to be programmed to have channel 80 (or any other international channel) available if there is no intention to use it and the operator does not hold a short range certificate.

The CSR Marina Licence is renewable annually and is also available as a temporary licence, valid for up to 28 days to cover sporting and other special events. Applications should be made to the Ofcom Licensing Centre. As at May 2007, the fee is £75.00 for annual, and £20.00 for Temporary CSR Marina licences.

Application forms are available at:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/manage-your-licence/radiocommunication-licences/maritime-radio>

VHF Radio Afloat

Where the radio on board has access only to channels M and M2, no separate licence is required as the use is covered under the CSR Marina licence. Furthermore, a Maritime Radio Operator Certificate, although desirable is not essential.

Where the radio on board has access to channel 80 (157.025/161.625 MHz) and/or other international channels, a separate licence must be held; two types of licence are available:-

- Ship Radio Licence
- Ship Portable Radio Licence

Ship Radio Licence

The Ship Radio Licence permits standard maritime radio equipment (including radar etc.) to be used on board a particular vessel using an international call sign.

It should be noted that in all cases, the use of the UK Marine channels M (157.850 MHz) and M2 (161.425 MHz) is limited to UK territorial waters only.

Ship Portable Radio Licence

The Ship Portable Radio licence allows a named licensee to have one VHF portable maritime radio for use on different vessels, using a “T number” call sign. (The radio must have an integral antenna and power supply). Other radio equipment such as one EPIRB/PLB can also be included; further details are available at:

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/112666/Ship-Radio-Licences-Guidance-notes-for-licensing.pdf

The Ship Portable Radio Licence is intended for use in UK territorial waters only.

Obtaining a Ship radio or Ship Portable Radio licence – online

Since December 2006, using the Ofcom website, boat owners have been able to apply online free of charge for a new licence or to amend the details of an existing one. Paper based applications are subject to a one off fee of £20.

Although there is no end date on the licence, licensees must validate their licence at least once every ten years. There is no charge for validating your licence, and it can be done either online or by using a paper based application form.

There is no charge for amending (or validating licences), whether done on-line or by post.

If a licensee sells their vessel it is important for them to surrender their licence. This can be done online or by using a paper based form. Should they purchase a vessel they should apply for a new licence indicating the details of the vessel’s call sign and Maritime Mobile Service Identity where applicable, as these must remain with the vessel.

It is still a legal requirement for vessel owners that have radio equipment with access to international channels on board their vessel, to have an up-to-date radio licence. They must keep these on board where practicable and in any case must be kept on board if the vessel is taken abroad. Owners that do not hold a valid licence may be fined up to £5000 and face a prison sentence of up to 6 months.

For the Licence Terms, please refer to the “Sample Licence” available at:

<http://licensing.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/spectrum/ships-radio/samplelicence.pdf>

Bases Stations, Ship Radio Licence and Ship Portable Radio Licences – Radio Equipment/Operator Certification:

Equipment whether ashore or aboard ship, must meet certain minimum approval requirements (e.g. “Wheel marking”/CE marking and comply with the relevant UK Interface Requirement, or have previously been type approved). VHF equipment in every vessel having access to international channels must be under the control of an operator holding as a minimum, the Short Range Certificate and an Authority to Operate. The Authority to Operate may be issued at the same time as the certificate of competence.

Licences are valid only if the licensee/vessel/base station details accord with the details of the Licence. Any changes in licensing details must be notified to Ofcom for re-issue of the licence as necessary. There is no charge for this whether done online or by post.

Authority to Operate:

The Authority to Operate relates to the individual who must undertake an approved training course for example, the Short Range Certificate (SRC) which covers VHF radiotelephony. The RYA offers SRC VHF courses, further details of which can be found on our website.

Application forms for the examination for the certificate of competence in radiotelephony, restricted to VHF only, can be obtained from RYA House, Ensign Way, Hamble, Hants, SO31 4YA.

Contacts:

Ofcom Licensing Centre
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

Tel: 020 7981 3131

Fax: 020 7981 3235

Email: licensingcentre@Ofcom.org.uk

For more information kindly contact the RYA Legal Team on 023 8060 4223 or legal@rya.org.uk

This leaflet has been produced with the assistance of Ofcom.

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