

have practical utility; the accuracy of the Department's estimate of the burden of the proposed information collection; ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Issued in Washington, D.C. on March 11, 1998.

Vanester M. Williams,

Clearance Officer, United States Department of Transportation.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Coast Guard

[USCG-1998-3584]

Proposed Modernization of the Coast Guard National Distress System

AGENCY: Coast Guard, DOT.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental assessment; and request for public comment.

SUMMARY: The United States Coast Guard (USCG) is seeking early public input on their proposed action to modernize the National Distress System (NDS), a major portion of their Short Range Communications System (SRCS). To more effectively accomplish maritime safety, maritime law enforcement, national security, and marine environmental protection, the USCG needs a more efficient, modern, and technologically advanced system than the current NDS.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Coast Guard intends to prepare a programmatic environmental assessment (EA) on the viable alternatives for achieving a more modern and effective system. The environmental assessment will examine the reasonable alternatives available to the USCG to fulfill their need for an efficient, modern, and technologically improved National Distress System and whether any alternatives have the potential for significant environmental impacts. At this time, the USCG does not have a preferred alternative.

Specifically, we are requesting input on any environmental concerns you may have related to the existing NDS or to alternatives for achieving a modernized system, suggested analyses or methodologies for inclusion in the EA, possible sources of relevant data or

information, or other alternatives not included in this notice.

DATES: Comments must be received by 13 April 1998.

ADDRESSES: You may mail comments to the Docket Management Facility, [USCG-1998-3584], U.S. Department of Transportation, Room PL-401, 400 Seventh Street SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001, or deliver them to room PL-401, located on the Plaza Level of the Nassif Building at the same address between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. The telephone number to the Docket Management Facility is (202) 366-9329.

The Docket Management Facility maintains the public docket for this notice. Comments, and documents as indicated in this preamble, will become part of this docket and will be available for inspection or copying at room PL-401, located on the Plaza Level of the Nassif Building at the above address between 9:30 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Dan Muslin, telephone: (619) 532-3403, for questions concerning this notice, the proposed modernization project, or the associated EA. For questions concerning the Docket Management Facility contact Paulette Twine, Chief, Documentary Services Division, U.S. Department of Transportation, telephone (202) 366-9329.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Request for Comments

The Coast Guard encourages your participation in the environmental analysis of the proposed NDS modernization by the submission of written data, views, or arguments. Your comments should include your name and address, and identify this notice [USCG-1998-3584] and the specific section of the notice to which each comment applies, along with the reason for each comment. Please submit all comments and attachments in an unbound format, no larger than 8½ by 11 inches, suitable for copying and electronic filing to the DOT Docket Management Facility at the address under **ADDRESSES**. If you want acknowledgment of receipt of your comment, enclose a stamped, self-addressed postcard or envelope.

The Coast Guard will consider all comments received during the comment period.

The Coast Guard plans no public hearing. You may request a public hearing by submitting a request to the address under **ADDRESSES**. The request should include the reasons a hearing

would be beneficial. If the Coast Guard determines that oral presentations are crucial to the preparation of the EA, and will significantly aid in environmental planning for the proposal, it will hold a public hearing at a time and place announced by a later notice in the **Federal Register**.

Background

The NDS forms the backbone of the Coast Guard's Short Range Communication System (SRCS) which supports Coast Guard Activity, Group, Marine Safety Office (MSO), Vessel Traffic Service (VTS), Air Station, Cutter and Station operations. As part of the SRCS, the National Distress System incorporates the use of VHF-FM radios to provide two-way voice communications coverage for the majority of Coast Guard missions in coastal areas and navigable waterways where commercial and recreational traffic exists. The system, consisting of approximately 300 remotely controlled VHF transceivers and antenna high-level sites, was originally intended for monitoring the international VHF-FM maritime distress frequency (Channel 16), and as the primary command and control network to coordinate Coast Guard search and rescue (SAR) response activities. The secondary function was to provide command, control, and communications for the Coast Guard missions of National Security, Maritime Safety, Law Enforcement, and Marine Environmental Protection.

Need for Action

Due to the following deficiencies present in the current system, the Coast Guard has identified a need for an efficient, modern, more technologically advanced National Distress System than the one currently in place:

Obsolete/Nonstandard Equipment. The NDS was originally put into service in the 1970's and now suffers from technological obsolescence. Much of the existing equipment is no longer commercially available off-the-shelf and is becoming increasingly difficult to support. The expected service life of electronic equipment installed during this period was 15 years. Equipment failures have necessitated the replacement of many system components that are no longer commercially available, resulting in a lack of standardization. Costly short-term fixes such as individual off-the-shelf purchases of equipment (e.g., new command modules, recording and playback equipment, direction finding receivers, cellular phones, and Digital Encryption Standard (DES) radios) and services are being applied in the field to

marginally sustain the current system. The result is a collection of nonstandard and difficult to maintain equipment.

Coverage Gaps. The current NDS was intended to provide coverage extending out to approximately 20 nautical miles from shore. The present system does not provide complete coverage of the continental U.S. coastal areas, bays, inlets, and river systems. Presently there are over 65 verified gaps and numerous localized coverage deficiencies identified by local operational commanders.

Inadequate Channel Capacity. Twenty years of expanding CG mission requirements have also added to the traffic load, far exceeding the capacity of the original design. The NDS now suffers from inadequate channel capacity especially during multiple simultaneous operations and "surge" operations. The system does not have a sufficient number of channels or adequate channel capacity to allow the Coast Guard to respond to crisis operations and provide sufficient voice channel and communications capacity to support multiple Coast Guard operations. When the Coast Guard is transmitting on the system, we are unable to adequately monitor the VHF-FM international distress frequency at the same time.

No Digital Selective Calling Capability. Recent amendments to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Safety Of Life At Sea (SOLAS) agreements concerning the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) require that SOLAS-class vessels carry Digital Selective Calling (DSC) equipped VHF-FM radios by 1 February 1999. These vessels will no longer be required to monitor Channel 16 at sea after February 2005, and will increasingly be using Channel 70 VHF-FM (DSC only) as the international VHF-FM distress and calling channel after February 1999. Additionally, DSC equipment may be used by any vessel voluntarily. The current NDS does not have DSC capability which will result in the Coast Guard becoming increasingly unable to communicate with large segments of the maritime industry/public on international VHF-FM distress frequencies.

Not Adequately Reliable During/After Natural Disasters. The current NDS is extremely susceptible to catastrophic failure during a major natural disaster. A failure to any part of the system will in many cases result in loss of communication in wide areas of the system's advertised coverage. The system cannot restore key operational links and system components within a reasonable period following a failure.

The system does not provide adequate backup power to critical and primary communications system components.

No Interface with Rest of the Coast Guard Telecommunication System. The current NDS has no interface with our Long Range Communications System (LRCS), our data network, nor the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). These deficiencies decrease the Coast Guard's ability to effectively conduct its missions.

Inadequate Transmission Security. The system is severely limited in its ability to protect communications when transmitting sensitive information. This is key while conducting many Coast Guard missions (e.g., law enforcement, search and rescue, pollution response). Security of internal Coast Guard transmissions is mandated by National Security Decision Directive 145 (NSDD 145), Presidential Directive 24 (PD 24), and their follow-on directive, National Security Directive 42 (NSD 42).

Inadequate Communications with Public Safety and Other Agencies. Essential communications with other Federal, State, and local agencies are often hindered or unavailable due to lack of compatible communications equipment.

Poor Position Locating Capability. The system cannot adequately pinpoint the location of a caller and, therefore, is limited in its ability to aid in search for vessels or survivors that do not report, do not know, or incorrectly report, their position, nor can it adequately assist in locating hoax originators.

Limited Data Capability. The system also has limited ability to transmit or obtain information regarding marine safety, environmental monitoring/compliance, intelligence information, or information to and from mariners and others. Such information could include situational and operational reports, automated Coast Guard asset tracking, transmission of search and rescue (SAR) or law enforcement information, and marine safety broadcasts.

Poor Caller Verification Assistance and Recording Capability. Finally, the system does not have capability to adequately record and instantly playback incoming voice transmissions to aid immediate responses and for record purposes.

Purpose of the Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide an efficient, cost-effective, and technologically adequate National Distress System that rectifies the deficiencies listed previously and adequately supports Coast Guard Activity, Group, Marine Safety Office

(MSO), Vessel Traffic Service (VTS), Air Station, Cutter, and Station operations.

Alternatives

The Coast Guard's proposed action is to modernize the current obsolete and nonstandard NDS by adopting one of the general concepts for a new system presented in alternatives B, C or D listed below. Alternative A (Status Quo or no action) will not fulfill the stated need; however, it will be analyzed in the EA to provide a baseline for comparison with the action alternatives. Currently, the Coast Guard does not have a preferred alternative among B, C or D. The following alternatives are being considered in the EA:

Alternative A—Status Quo. Continue operations with existing network of analog transceivers. Provide logistics support as needed and as available.

Alternative B—Upgrade Status Quo. Systematically upgrade existing network with modern analog transceivers. Integrate DSC, digital encryption standard (DES), and digital recording equipment. This alternative replaces old equipment with new equipment and adds additional radio capability. Adding position location and filling coverage gaps is also desired. It is expected that fulfilling these last two requirements will require additional antenna sites.

Alternative C—Dual Mode VHF and/or UHF Network. Replace existing analog network with dual mode (digital) and analog transceivers. Digital: Programmable and adaptable to digital signal processing technologies and narrowband channel spacing. Analog: compatible to the VHF marine radios in use by the maritime public. Integrate DSC, encryption capability, digital recording equipment, and data transmission capability. This alternative replaces old radios with new equipment and also adds additional radio capability. Adding position location and filling coverage gaps is also desired. It is expected that fulfilling these last two requirements will require additional antenna sites.

Alternative D—Multi-Mode: Satellite, Cellular, VHF and/or UHF Network. Replace the existing network with multi-mode equipment that utilizes satellite, cellular, and VHF/UHF communications. Integrate DSC, signal encryption capability, digital recording equipment, and data transmission capability. Adding position location and filling coverage gaps is also desired. It is expected that fulfilling these last two requirements will require additional antenna sites.

All the alternatives will require approximately the same number of additional antenna sites with the

exception of the "Status Quo" alternative.

Affected Environment

The environment which may be affected by the proposed action may be portions of the marine and terrestrial (both urban and rural) coastal region of the continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, the Caribbean, Guam, the Great Lakes and major inland bays and waterways (including Western Rivers) where the Coast Guard has jurisdiction and where commercial and/or recreational maritime traffic exist. The EA will discuss the general aspects of the affected environment outlined above and areas of discussion may include air quality, terrestrial vegetation and wildlife (perhaps including endangered species and their habitat), prime and unique farmlands, historic and cultural resources, wetlands, parks, sanctuaries, conservation/preservation areas, 100-year flood plains, marine vegetation and wildlife (perhaps including endangered species and their habitat), and water quality.

Anticipated Environmental Issues

Areas of Potential Environmental Concern

Internal research has revealed that the following areas may be issues of possible environmental concern: Radio waves (estimated 100 MHz to 1 GHz) from antenna sites; disposal of replaced system components and any associated hazardous materials, including future disposal of any hazardous materials associated with the new system; disturbance of nesting birds, or possible bird mortality from striking tower guy wires or from construction of antenna sites, enclosures, and land lines. Possible impacts from construction could be: disturbance of vegetation and wildlife (perhaps including endangered species and their habitat) wetland disturbance, air emissions, effects to historic/cultural resources including archeological resources, air quality, aesthetics, and construction noise.

Anticipated Environmental Benefits

Oil Spill Prevention. Increased prevention of accident such as oil spills or other hazardous materials from increased ability to track commercial shipping and prevent groundings.

Oil Spill Clean Up. Expedited cleanup of accidents such as oil spills or other hazardous material spills from increased ability to: pinpoint the location of a

distressed vessel or accident, respond quickly to distress calls, contact and coordinate with appropriate spill response teams and other important specialists outside the Coast Guard, disseminate marine safety information, and continue operations during natural disasters.

Endangered Species Act/Conservation Laws Warnings/Enforcement. Increased ability to communicate environmental information/warnings to mariners regarding endangered species sightings/activity (e.g., North Atlantic Right Whale, Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, manatee). Improved coordination of responses with National Marine Fisheries Service and state/local civilian responders to distressed endangered species (e.g., stranded, entangled, or distressed animals). Increased ability to communicate important environmental information to State or local environmental agencies for record purposes. Improved protection of communications for fisheries and conservation enforcement. Anticipated Non-Environmental Benefits.

Increased Safety of Human Life. Increased ability to communicate with, and respond to, the maritime public (recreational and commercial) when in distress. Position locating capability will improve response time, reducing loss of life. Digital Selective Calling capability will allow receipt of distress alerts from DSC-equipped vessels.

Increased Public Service. The Coast Guard will be able to receive all incoming short-range distress calls without interruption. Additionally, the Coast Guard will be able to close the current gaps in communication coverage and achieve improved overall communications with various Federal, State, and local agencies.

Increased Maritime Law Enforcement. The protection of sensitive communications will enhance the Coast Guard law enforcement capability and interoperability with other federal, state, and local agencies.

Increased National Security. In addition to supporting Maritime Law Enforcement, improved communications protection in the modernization NDS will support defense missions in the coastal areas.

R.J. Casto,

Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard, Assistant Commandant for Acquisition.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

RTCA Special Committee 186/Eurocae Working Group 51; Automatic Dependent Surveillance—Broadcast (ADS-B)

Pursuant to section 10(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (Pub. L. 92-463, 5 U.S.C., Appendix 2), notice is hereby given for Special Committee 186/EUROCAE Working Group 51 joint meeting to be held April 1-2, 1998, starting at 9:00 a.m. The meeting will be held at RTCA, 1140 Connecticut Avenue, NW., Suite 1020, Washington, DC 20036.

The agenda will include: (1) Chairman's Introductory Remarks/Review of Meeting Agenda; (2) Review and Approval of Minutes of the Previous Meeting; (3) Report of Working Group Activities: a. Working Group 1; b. 1090 MHz MOPS; c. CDTI MOPS; d. Working Group 4; (4) EUROCAE Working Group 51 Report, Status of VHR MOPS: a. Present ATC Systems; b. Evolving ATC Systems; c. Aircraft Changes and Architecture Options; d. Implementation Strategy; e. Summary; (5) EUROCAE Discussion of VDL Mode 4, Technical Description and Ongoing European Programs: a. EMERALD Program; b. FREER Project; (6) Discuss Special Committee 186 Reorganization; (7) Other Business; (8) Date and Place of Next Meeting.

Attendance is open to the interested public but limited to space availability. With the approval of the chairman, members of the public may present oral statements at the meeting. Persons wishing to present statements or obtain information should contact the RTCA Secretariat, 1140 Connecticut Avenue, NW., Suite 1020, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 833-9339 (phone); (202) 833-9434 (fax); or <http://www.rtca.org> (web site). Members of the public may present a written statement to the committee at any time.

Issued in Washington, DC, on March 11, 1998.

Terry R. Hannah,

Designated Official.

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