

Anatomy of an MMSI number by VEOMWD

MMSI numbers came into common usage with the availability of DSC (digital selective calling) radios. MMSI stands for Maritime Mobile Service Identity -the scheme managed by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in Geneva, Switzerland. Here's how it works: each vessel applies for an MMSI number that is unique to that vessel. The same number is shared by all radios on board. Acting somewhat like a phone number, the MMSI can be used to "call" a specific vessel (or even a group of vessels).

One of the motivating factors behind the creation of the MMSI system was to allow watch standers to ignore most of the idle radio chit-chat, but be alerted when a message is intended for their own vessel. (By default, all distress messages are sent to ALL vessels.) When a radio call encoded with your MMSI is received, your radio will sound a special tone to alert you to an incoming message (much like a phone rings to alert you to an incoming call).

There are four types of MMSI numbers, each intended for a certain purpose. The types are assigned to one of the following:

1. An individual vessel (ship station identity)
2. Groups of vessels (group ship station identity)
3. A shore-side facility (coast station identity)
4. A group of shore-side facilities (group coast station identities)

Embedded within each MMSI is a country code or a set of Maritime Identification Digits (MID). The MID is typically a three digit code, between 200 and 799. Canada has been assigned 316, the US has been assigned MID 366 (along with 388, 367, 368 and 369). For other country's MIDs, see <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-R/terrestrial/fmd/Pages/mid.aspx>

The first few digits of the MMSI can tell you what type of station you're calling. An individual vessel's MMSI will start with the MID. So, in Canada, a boat's MMSI number looks like this: 316XXXXXX. If, on the other hand, you have an MMSI for a group of vessels, you'd expect to see a number that looks like this: 0316XXXXX. Note the leading zero - which indicates a ship group number. Coast stations have two leading zeros before the MID, so they look like this: 00316XXXX.

In each case, the 316 would get replaced by another code for any non-Canadian vessels or coast stations. And the XXX's indicate the unique identifier for that particular station (or group of stations).

Canadians obtain their free MMSI number by contacting Industry Canada at <http://sd.ic.gc.ca>

MMSI Cheat Sheet. Here's a little cheat sheet that might be handy to carry aboard:

<u>MMSI Number or Pattern</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
MIDXXXXXX	Individual ship
0MIDXXXXX	Group of ships
00MIDXXXX	Land station or group of land stations