



PUBLIC NOTICE

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FCC ANNOUNCES TRANSITION AND OUTREACH PLAN TO FACILITATE ITS WITHDRAWAL AS ACCOUNTING AUTHORITY IN THE MARITIME MOBILE AND MARITIME MOBILE-SATELLITE RADIO SERVICES

Customers Currently Subscribed to US01 Must Select a New Accounting Authority

IB Docket No. 98-96

By this *Public Notice*, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) announces that it will stop performing the functions of an accounting authority for international maritime mobile communications one year from today, on April 22, 2020. Users that have relied on the FCC as an accounting authority need to affirmatively select a different accounting authority. Failure to do so could render users unable to transmit maritime communications other than distress messages.

Background. International maritime mobile communications fall into two general categories. One consists of terrestrial radio communications on high frequency or very high frequency channels between a radio on board a U.S.-registered ship and a foreign coast station operated by a telecommunications provider in the country in which the station is located. The second category consists of international maritime mobile-satellite communications services between a radio on board a U.S.-registered ship and a foreign coast earth station that is operated by a satellite-based telecommunications provider. In both cases, payment for the services provided by the telecommunications provider involves interaction with an entity known as an “accounting authority,” which settles an account between the telecommunications operator and the customer. The function of the accounting authority, also referred to as a “clearinghouse” or “settlement authority,” involves presenting the bill to the customer, accepting payment from the customer, and remitting the collected funds to the telecommunications provider.

Currently, the Commission acts as the accounting authority for private and Federal U.S.-registered vessels that have selected accounting authority identification code (AAIC) US01, and as the “accounting authority of last resort” for users that have not designated an accounting authority to act for them. On December 21, 2018, the Commission released a *Second Report and Order* in which it decided to implement an orderly transfer of its accounting authority duties to private accounting authorities no later than one year following the announcement of a transition plan.¹ This *Public Notice* constitutes that announcement.

¹ *In the Matter of 1998 Biennial Regulatory Review -- Review of Accounts Settlement in the Maritime Mobile and Maritime Mobile-Satellite Radio Services and Withdrawal of the Commission as an Accounting Authority in the*

(continued...)

FCC to Withdraw as an Accounting Authority. The FCC will continue to act as the accounting authority for terminals subscribed to AAIC US01 for one year. The FCC will stop performing the functions of an accounting authority at the close of business on April 22, 2020, and will withdraw as an accounting authority. AAIC US01 will be deactivated.

Safety Services Will Be Affected. Those using Inmarsat-C terminals under the International Maritime Organization's Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), Long Range Identification and Tracking, and Ship Security and Alert System that have selected AAIC US01 will be affected by this change. Affected GMDSS terminals will still be capable of transmitting a distress alert.

*US01 Users Must Select an Accounting Authority.*² No later than April 22, 2020, users that have relied on the Commission as an accounting authority must affirmatively select an accounting authority, contract with such entity as their new accounting authority, and reactivate/recommission their terminal(s) with their selected accounting authority's AAIC.³

You can find instructions on how to transfer your terminal to a new Accounting Authority on the FCC website: <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-withdraws-accounting-authority-maritime-mobile-services>.

We strongly encourage affected users to take these actions at the earliest opportunity, rather than waiting until the end of the one-year transition period. Failure to select an accounting authority before the FCC stops performing accounting authority functions will cause a terminal to be barred, rendering such users unable to transmit maritime messages other than distress alerts, potentially interrupting important maritime safety communications as well as routine private communications.

Private accounting authorities are certified under Part 3 of the Commission's rules and operate under the Commission's regulatory oversight.⁴ They "must offer their services to any member of the public making a reasonable request therefor, without undue discrimination against any customer or class of customer," and must charge "reasonable and non-discriminatory" fees for service.⁵ Customers transitioning to a private accounting authority may file a complaint with the FCC if they encounter unreasonably high rates or discriminatory treatment in violation of FCC rules.⁶

Outreach. This *Public Notice* commences the Commission's efforts to notify users that

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Maritime Mobile and Maritime Mobile-Satellite Radio Services, Second Report and Order, FCC 18-186 (2019) (*Second Report and Order*).

² See <https://www.itu.int/mmsapp/AccountingAuthority/list>. Some of these private accounting authorities may not currently settle accounts for maritime services, or may serve only their own fleets, or may no longer be active. However, any certified U.S. accounting authority may settle accounts for any class of service.

³ Inmarsat terminal owners who are uncertain who their accounting authority is should refer to their original Inmarsat terminal commissioning documentation. Otherwise, if they have not received a bill for an operating Inmarsat terminal in over a year, they should assume that they are affected by the Commission's withdrawal from acting as an accounting authority.

⁴ 47 CFR §§ 3.1 et seq.

⁵ 47 CFR § 3.10(e).

⁶ For additional information about filing complaints with the FCC, customers should visit the FCC's Consumer Complaint Center at: <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/>; see also 47 CFR § 3.10(e).

have relied on the FCC as an accounting authority that they must take affirmative actions to select private accounting authorities by April 22, 2020 in order to avoid service interruptions. Other efforts to ensure that the message is clear and disseminated in multiple ways to reach as many affected users as feasible will include the following:

- The Commission will send written notification, using the contact information on file, to all users—governmental and non-governmental—that used the FCC as an accounting authority since January 1, 2016, regarding the need to select a private accounting authority.
- Enhanced group call messages regarding the need for users that have relied on the FCC as an accounting authority to select a new accounting authority will be sent to Inmarsat-C terminals⁷ on a regular basis throughout the one-year transition period.⁸ Users should make sure that such terminals have an operating interconnected printer or other means for receiving, displaying, and retaining these enhanced group call messages. Commission staff will work with Inmarsat to explore other potential methods for notifying affected Inmarsat-C terminal owners, but users should not rely on receiving any other direct notification unless, as noted above, they have used the FCC as an accounting authority since January 1, 2016.
- Commission staff will further remind affected users of the need to select a private accounting authority by Public Notice.
- Commission staff have developed a series of frequently asked questions concerning this transition and outreach plan that can be accessed at: <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-withdraws-accounting-authority-maritime-mobile-services>. The Commission will update these frequently asked questions throughout the transition period.

For further information, contact Tim Dates, Office of the Managing Director, Tim.Dates@fcc.gov, (202) 418-0496.

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⁷ The Commission noted that, because most newer mobile satellite services operate their own land earth stations, the greatest need for continuing with accounting authorities is for legacy mobile satellite systems capable of operating through independently-owned land earth stations, particularly the Inmarsat-C system. *See Second Report and Order*, at 4, para. 9.

⁸ It is anticipated that messages will be sent 6 months, 3 months, 30 days, 1 week, and 1 day before the end of the one-year transition period.