

**TECHNOLOGY**

# Just click to certificate

A new online initiative has been launched to help people in the maritime industry gain GMDSS qualifications whilst at sea...

**GMDSS equipment simulators available:**

- VHF radio simulator
- NAVTEX simulator
- MF/HF radio simulator
- INMARSAT-C simulator
- and more

**GMDSS VET providers**  
(Vocational Education and Training)



A new phase of an online learning course has been launched to support the regular refreshing of skills to reduce human and material loss at sea.

The European Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (EGMDSS) 'e-learning' project first started in 2006 in response to



concerns that knowledge and skills are not being sufficiently refreshed and maintained at sea — particularly in the case of emergency communications.

The initiative was developed by 11 major European maritime education and training organisations based in nine countries. It had the backing of the EU, through the Leonardo da Vinci Programme to support vocational training and education.

The initial phase of the scheme resulted in an award-winning website ([www.egmdss.com](http://www.egmdss.com)) which aims to serve as a single resource for all sorts of people in the marine sector.

The background to the scheme lay with the satcoms-based Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), which came into full effect worldwide in February 1999.

There was a recognition that GMDSS sought to standardise communications equipment and procedures across all sectors at sea — meaning that people working in the marine world, including

seafarers, fishing vessel crews, yacht crews, sailing boat skippers and port and harbour workers, need to be qualified to operate the specified equipment.

All mariners must obtain the appropriate type of GMDSS certificate, but the teams behind the project were concerned that access to the required knowledge is limited because traditional vocational education and training (VET) is expensive and distance learning was not feasible.

The project therefore sought to offer online GMDSS short-range courses to mariners to enable them to operate VHF radio, NAVTEX receivers, SART and EPIRBs, and to offer a dedicated e-learning system to GMDSS VET providers to be able to maintain such courses. It includes real-life animations and simulations of GMDSS communication devices and operations to convey to the learner how to use such equipment.

Dr Martin Ziarati, director of



**Above: web page as it appears on screen.**

**Left: Dr Martin Ziarati, director of the Centre for Factories of the Future (C4FF), partners in the initiative.**

Online courses are available for a range of vital communications devices  
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the Centre for Factories of the Future (C4FF) which is one of the partners in the initiative, describes the EGMDSS initiative as a necessity and says the website can give sailors of all abilities the understanding of onboard equipment in a basic learning system.

'As many amateur yachtsmen have realised, it's only when an emergency occurs that you wished that you had attended a course learning some basic knowledge of the different types of equipment onboard,' he said.

'By going through this self-learning and self-assessing course, the basic understanding of such equipment can be learnt. It's quick and easy to get started by clicking on the various icons on the website and begin learning and testing one's knowledge.'

The website gained more than 24,000 registered users within a short time of being launched, and is available in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Greek, Turkish, Polish, Finnish, and Slovenian, with the aim of encouraging and promoting lifelong learning.

This initial success ultimately led to the next stage of the project, which is called 'EGMDSS VET' and is also funded by the same EU training programme. It is focused on two target groups: mariners and GMDSS VET providers.

A core element is a long-range certificate (LRC) course, which aims to be of particular benefit to

radio operators on leisure or commercial vessels not covered by the SOLAS Convention but which are fitted with long-range communications (MF/HF radio) or satellite equipment.

Content from the LRC course is split into different chapters, each covering a particular subject. For example, the first chapter covers the basics of GMDSS, while others cover theory and practice for the different equipment involved.

The project developers say the scheme puts a learner into an active role — instead of answering questions, people can actively practice and verify their knowledge on a simulator. And at the end of each chapter, there is a short quiz to enable users to refresh their knowledge in a structured way.

The website also allows academic institutes or training centres to create an unlimited number of courses that includes text material, images, graphs, quizzes and much more — as well as being able to use a wide-range of simulators, including a VHF radio simulator, MF/HF radio simulator and a NAVTEX simulator all for free.

Besides aiming at those with relatively little basic knowledge, the project aims to encourage lifelong learning in GMDSS and to maintain and update the level of professional knowledge and skills of seafarers, in turn helping to improve safety at sea through better vocational training and qualifications.