

On the button



communications

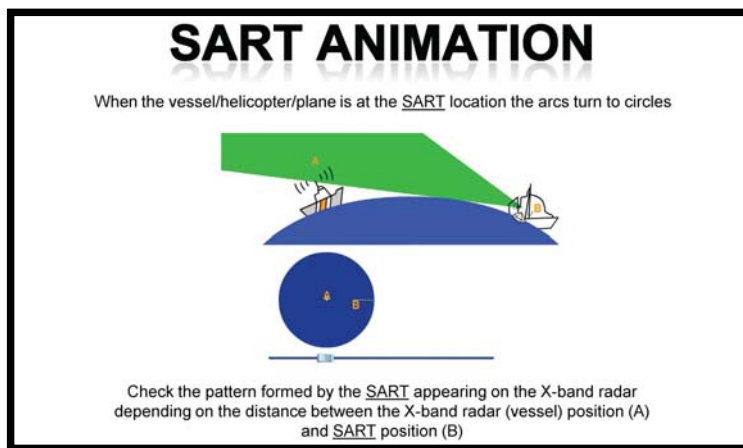
Dr Martin Ziarati, director of the Centre for Factories of the Future, describes a new European GMDSS 'e-learning' initiative...

IT IS ESSENTIAL to ensure the safety of life and vessels at sea. Well, that is the primary function of maritime radio – but what free, useful and user-friendly learning materials are available to assist the use of such equipment in emergency situations?

There were concerns over the limited access to such learning materials, and as a result some 11 major European organisations in the maritime industry came together to address this problem through the EGMSS project (www.egmdss.com).

Just as every driver needs a licence to drive a car, operators of marine radios also require a licence. A person operating a VHF radio system sailing in GMDSS Sea Area A1 must be qualified to a minimum standard – the GMDSS SRC (Short Range Certificate).

Access to SRC course self-learning and self-assessment materials is essential for the 2m people across Europe involved with sailing, and this led to the creation of the GMDSS e-learning and e-assessment platforms – enabling them to regularly



ABOVE: one of the animations that form part of the online EGMSS self-learning training package
RIGHT: the 'start' page on the Short Range Certificate course developed by 11 major European organisations

refresh their knowledge when and where they wanted.

Access to animations and simulators that support this training are essential for life-long learning and keeping SRC skills up-to-date to refresh one's knowledge for those rare times that emer-

gencies occur at sea. Such knowledge and skills should be refreshed regularly to ensure the safety of the crew, passengers and freight.

The EGMSS project had the aim of developing an SRC course using e-learning technology, with

the purpose that access to the SRC course should be free of charge and should include real-life animations of GMDSS communication devices and operations to convey to the learner how to use such equipment.

The SRC course includes

GMDSS communication device simulators that put the learner into an active role, instead of simply answering questions. The learner actively practices and verifies their knowledge on a simulator.

From a very early stage of development with a VHF radio simulator, the EGMSS project was recognised as a 'top 10' e-learning resource chosen from a large array of 443 online learning materials in the European Commission's 'My favourite e-learning resources' contest.

The obvious next stage of development for this VHF GMDSS course was to a full SRC course, applicable for use across the whole of Europe, in nine languages. Partially funded through the EU Leonardo programme, the EGMSS project has taken two years of hard work and dedication from the 11 European partners to develop a very useful learning tool.

Spinkar, the largest maritime training provider in Slovenia and Centre for Factories of the Future (C4FF), an instigator of a number of innovative maritime education projects based in Coventry, jointly developed the SRC course with the latter running all EGMSS project operations in English-speaking countries.

To obtain an SRC certificate, a candidate must be able to competently operate four different GMDSS communication devices (VHF DSC, Navtex, EPIRB and SART). The online SRC course includes a DSC VHF radio simulator, a NAVTEX receiver simulator, SART animations and EPIRB content, as well as quizzes to assess the individual's understanding of the subject matter

and all this is available online for free.

The simulators are available in a separate web browser window, so that learners can access the SRC in one window and practice in the simulator in another web browser window. Thus, the learners can practice and verify their knowledge on simulators without needing to instantly return to the course.

It's quick to get started by clicking on the various icons on the website and begin learning and testing one's knowledge. The developers are keen to hear your comments and feedback to support the plans for the development of further courses at higher certification levels such as LRC, ROC, GOC and REO, as well as obtaining accreditation by national and international bodies and authorities.

The SRC course will support those who are learning about the subject matter for the first time, or just refreshing their knowledge or simply preparing for the SRC examination.

The website's ability to assist SRC learning throughout the world by supporting learning in nine languages can be seen as a great way to make the seas safer.

The word is spreading fast – with more than 13,000 registered users now attending the EGMSS SRC course. 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. By going through this self-learning and self-assessing course, the basic understanding of such equipment can be learnt.

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