
Keeping an ear on the US Coast Guard

By Jock Elliott KB2GOM

Wandering the vast expanses of YouTube, I encountered an episode of [“Coast Guard Alaska” on DangerTV’s Protecting Our Waters/Coast Guard Rescue Series playlist](#). One episode led to another, and before long, I was binge-watching the series.

Why? Because the courage, dedication and performance of the “Coasties” is just extraordinary. They dangle from hoist cables to pluck survivors from the water, injured sailors from the decks of ships, mariners from sinking vessels, and even incapacitated hikers from mountains. They medevac sick and injured men, women, and children out of remote Alaskan villages; provide medical support while flying them to higher levels of care, and intercept drug smugglers in southern waters. I stand in awe of these men and women. (And – woe is me – it turns out there are similar series for Coast Guard Pacific Northwest and Coast Guard Florida.)

So, I wondered, could I hear the US Coast Guard on the radio? The answer, it turns out is a mixed bag.

The U.S. Coast Guard ceased monitoring all High Frequency (HF) shortwave voice distress frequencies within the contiguous United States and Hawaii on **7 February 2022**. HF voice distress watchkeeping continues unaffected in Alaska and Guam. See below for the Alaska and Guam USB frequencies.

kHz SHIP STATION	kHz COAST STATION	Station and Schedule (UTC)
		NOJ (Kodiak AK)
4125	4125	24 HRS
6215	6215	24 HRS
8291	8291	24 HRS
12290	12290	
		Station and Schedule (UTC)
		Guam
6215	6215	0900-2100Z
12290	12290	2100-0900Z

Note: 12290 kHz is available under NOJ upon request

Note: 16420 kHz is available at NOJ and Guam upon request

So, if you have a good radio capable of upper sideband (USB) reception, a decent antenna and your location and/or propagation favors you, you might have a shot at hearing USCG Alaska or Guam HF communications.

National Weather Service Marine Products via U.S. Coast Guard HF Voice

You have a much better chance of hearing the U.S. Coast Guard broadcasting National Weather Service high seas forecasts and storm warnings from six high seas communication stations. See table below for station locations and schedules. Transmission range depends on operating frequency, time of day and atmospheric conditions and can vary from only short distances to several thousand miles.

For example, I have heard a weather forecast from the US Coast Guard Communications Command in Chesapeake, including a forecast of tropical weather from the National Hurricane Center, on 4426 USB at my home in upstate New York.

Here are the schedules:

Chesapeake (NMN) HF Voice Broadcast Schedule

4426, 6501, 8764 kHz (USB)	0330Z1	0515Z2	0930Z1				
6501, 8764, 13089 kHz (USB)			1115Z2	1530Z1	2130Z1	2315Z2	
8764, 13089, 17314 kHz (USB)				1715Z2			

1 Offshore Forecasts, hurricane information

2 High seas Forecast, hurricane information

Broadcast of hurricane and other weather broadcasts from this station may on occasion be preempted, as the frequencies are shared with other USCG stations.

New Orleans (NMG) HF Voice Broadcast Schedule

4316, 8502, 12788 kHz (USB)	0330Z1	0515Z2	0930Z1	1115Z2	1530Z1	1715Z2	2130Z1	2315Z2
--------------------------------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

1 Offshore Forecasts, hurricane information

2 Highseas Forecast, hurricane information

Broadcast of hurricane and other weather broadcasts from this station may on occasion be preempted, as the transmitters are shared with the radiofax broadcast.

Pt. Reyes (NMC) HF Voice Broadcast Schedule

4426, 8764, 13089 kHz (USB)	0430Z	1030Z
-----------------------------	-------	-------

8764, 13089, 17314 kHz (USB) 1630Z 2230Z

Broadcast of hurricane and other weather broadcasts from this station may on occasion be preempted, as the frequencies are shared with other USCG stations, and the transmitters are shared with the radiofax broadcast.

Kodiak (NOJ)

HF Voice Broadcast Schedule

6501 kHz (USB) 0203Z 1645Z

Honolulu (NMO)

HF Voice Broadcast Schedule

6501, 8764 kHz (USB) 0600Z 1200Z

8764, 13089 kHz (USB) 0005Z 1800Z

Guam (NRV)

HF Voice Broadcast Schedule

6501 kHz (USB) 0930Z 1530Z

13089 kHz (USB) 0330Z 2130Z

Coastal Maritime Safety Broadcasts on VHF

The other place in the radio spectrum where you might hear voice transmissions from the Coast Guard would be on the maritime VHF channels. Urgent marine navigational and weather information is broadcast over VHF channel 22A (157.1 MHz) from over 200 sites covering the coastal areas of the U.S., including the Great Lakes, major inland waterways, Puerto Rico, Alaska, Hawaii and Guam. Broadcasts are first announced over the distress, safety and calling channel 16 (156.8 MHz) before they are made. All ships in U.S. waters over 20m in length are required to monitor VHF channel 16, and must have radios capable of tuning to the VHF simplex channel 22A.

Although VHF signals are generally short range, here at El Rancho Elliott, I can clearly hear the announcement on channel 16 on a scanner and then I can switch to channel 22A to hear the broadcast, even though my location is at least 140 miles from the nearest large body of water. In addition, propagation sometimes opens up so that VHF signals can be heard at long distances.