

In the Market for a Fixed VHF?

Before you choose a VHF radio, decide how you'll be using it. Many operators have a VHF for emergencies and to make voice calls to friends on a favorite channel. Do you just need the basics too, or are there specific features that suit your needs? (DSC, built-in hailer, remote microphone capability, etc.)

As you wade through the myriad VHFs on the market, keep your planned uses in mind. There is no point in paying extra bucks for a radio with a hailer when you have no intention of installing a hailer horn.

Most VHF radios in the price range of those we tested are quality performers, so the differences will be in features, ergonomics, and design.

Key points to look for when buying a marine VHF, include:

- A large, easy-to-read screen
- Clearly marked keys and a handset with controls for channel, volume, etc.
- A VHF that can interface with a GPS and has DSC capabilities (This improves your chances of a quick response to a distress call thanks to the Coast Guard's Rescue 21, which is a VHF-based position locating, vessel identification program.)
- If comm stations above and belowdecks are planned, look for a VHF setup—either with two radios or a remote mic—that allows DSC calling from both stations.

Keep in mind when you are installing a VHF for the first time, you'll need to consider not only the radio purchase and installation but also buying and installing other required components like an antenna, a way to mount it, cable and fittings to connect the antenna to the radio, and a way to get power to the radio.

Additionally, to get the full value from DSC capabilities, we recommend connecting your VHF radio to your GPS unit. This will require making some additional electrical connections.