

Commercial Radio Operator License Program

FCC rules require that licensees of ship and aircraft stations permit only persons holding the appropriate FCC-issued commercial operator license to perform specified transmitter operation, maintenance and repair duties. To obtain a new or upgraded FCC commercial operator license, you must pass an examination administered by one of the [Commercial Operator License Examination Managers \(COLEMs\) \(/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/commercial-radio-operator-license-program/commercial\)](#).

Who Needs A Commercial Operator License?

You need a commercial operator license to operate, and/or to repair and maintain, specified ship, and aircraft radio communication stations. The licensing requirements for operating such radio stations and the licensing requirements for repairing and maintaining such radio stations are discussed separately below.

CAUTION: These listings only describe when a commercial operator license is necessary. A commercial operator license does not constitute or imply FCC authorization to transmit radio signals. Before you operate any radio station, make certain that the station is licensed as required by the FCC.

Radio Operations

You need a commercial radio operator license to operate the following:

- Ship radio stations if:
 - the vessel carries more than six passengers for hire; or
 - the radio operates on medium frequencies (MF) or high frequencies (HF); or
 - the ship sails to foreign ports; or

Rule Part

47 C.F.R, Parts 13

Radio Service Code(s)

CM - Commercial Operator

RR - Restricted Radiotelephone
Operator Permit

RL - Restricted Radiotelephone
Operator Permit-Limited Use

- the ship station transmits radiotelegraphy; or
- the ship is larger than 300 gross tons and is required by law to carry a radio station for safety purposes.
- Aircraft radio stations, **except** those which operate only on very high frequencies (VHF) and do not make foreign flights.

You do **NOT** need a commercial operator license to operate the following:

- Ship stations operating only on VHF frequencies that do not travel to foreign ports or make international communications (unless the vessel carries more than six passengers for hire, or the ship is larger than 300 gross tons and is required by law to carry a radio station for safety purposes).
- Shore radar, shore radiolocation, maritime support or shore radionavigation stations.
- Survival craft stations or EPIRBs.
- Ship radar stations, if (a) the radar frequency is determined by a nontunable, pulse type magnetron or other fixed tune device, and (b) the radar is capable of being operated exclusively by external controls.
- Coast stations.
- Aircraft stations which operate only on VHF frequencies and do not make foreign flights.
- Aircraft radar sets, radio altimeters, transponders or other aircraft automatic radionavigation transmitters.
- ELTs or aviation survival craft stations used solely for survival purposes.

Radio Maintenance and Repair

You need a commercial operator license to repair and maintain the following:

- All ship radio and radar stations.
- All coast stations.
- All hand-carried units used to communicate with ships and coast stations on marine frequencies.
- All aircraft stations and aeronautical ground stations (including hand-carried portable units) used to communicate with aircraft.

You do **NOT** need a commercial radio operator license to operate, repair, or maintain any of the following types of stations:

- Two-way land mobile radio equipment, such as that used by police and fire departments, taxicabs and truckers, businesses and industries, ambulances and rescue squads, and local, state, and federal government agencies.
- Personal radio equipment used in the Citizens Band Radio Service (CBRS), Radio Control Radio Service (RCRS), and General Mobile Radio Services (GMRS).
- Auxiliary broadcast stations, such as remote pickup stations.
- Domestic public fixed and mobile radio systems, such as mobile telephone systems, cellular systems, rural radio systems, point-to-point microwave systems, multipoint distribution systems, etc.
- Stations that operate in the Cable Television Relay Service.

- Satellite stations, both uplink and downlink of all types.

NOTE: Possession of a commercial radio operator license or permit does not authorize an individual to operate amateur or GMRS radio stations. Only a person holding an amateur or GMRS radio operator license may operate an amateur or GMRS radio station.

Additional Licensee Information

Operating While Application is Pending

A person who has filed an application for a commercial operator license with the FCC, and who holds a Proof of Passing Certificate(s) indicating that he or she has passed the necessary examination(s) within the previous 365 days, is authorized to exercise the rights and privileges of the applied-for operator license during the period before the FCC acts on the application, but only for a period of **90 days** from the date the application was filed, **provided** that the applicant has not had a commercial radio operator license revoked or suspended in the past, and is not the subject of an ongoing suspension proceeding.

Renewal Procedures

If you need to renew a commercial radio operator license, submit completed FCC Forms [159 \(Fee Processing Form\) \(/licensing-databases/forms#159orig\)](#) and [605 \(/licensing-databases/forms#605\)](#). A fee is required. Current information on the fee amount and filing location can be found in the most recent edition of the [Wireless Telecommunications Bureau Fee Filing Guide, FCC Form 1070Y \(/licensing-databases/forms#1070\)](#), or by calling the Customer Support Hotline at (877) 480-3201 (select option 2 after the main menu recording).

If you file an application to renew your license before it expires, you may continue to operate under the authority of your license while the FCC processes your renewal application. However, if you fail to renew your license before it expires, you cannot operate or maintain equipment that requires that license until it is renewed. You may file to renew your expired license any time during the five-year grace period after your license expires. If you fail to renew your license within the grace period, you must apply for a new license and re-take the required examination(s).

Important Note: Prior to March 25, 2008, the license term for GMDSS Radio Operator's Licenses, Restricted GMDSS Radio Operator's Licenses, GMDSS Radio Maintainer's Licenses, GMDSS Radio Operator/Maintainer Licenses, and Marine Radio Operator Permits was five years. Effective March 25, 2008, the rules were amended to extend the term of these licenses to the lifetime of the holder. Any GMDSS Radio Operator's License, Restricted GMDSS Radio Operator's License, GMDSS Radio Maintainer's License, GMDSS Radio Operator/Maintainer License, or Marine Radio Operator Permit that was active, *i.e.*, had not expired, as of March 25, 2008, does not have to be renewed, even if there is an expiration date on the face of the license document.

Posting of License or Permit

If you are employed at a station where your operator license must be posted, you may post either your proof of passing certificate or a signed copy of your renewal application instead of your license while your application for license renewal is being processed.

Lost, Stolen, Mutilated, or Destroyed Licenses

You may apply for a duplicate license by submitting FCC Forms [159 \(Fee Processing Form\) \(/licensing-databases/forms#159orig\)](#) and [605 \(/licensing-databases/forms#605\)](#) according to the instructions printed on the 605 application. A fee is required. Current information on the fee amount and filing location can be found in the most recent edition of the [Wireless Telecommunications Bureau Fee Filing Guide, FCC Form 1070Y \(/licensing-databases/forms#1070\)](#), or by calling the FCC's Consumer Center toll free at 1-888-CALL-FCC (225-5322). In the alternative, a licensee can print a new license document by following the procedures for providing access to official electronic authorizations see [DA 14-1846 \(https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-14-1846A1.pdf\)](#).

Name Changes

If you change your name, you must apply for a replacement license in your new legal name. Be sure to indicate the reason for your application and give both your former and new legal names.

Bureau/Office:

[Wireless Telecommunications \(https://www.fcc.gov/wireless-telecommunications\)](https://www.fcc.gov/wireless-telecommunications)

Tags:

[Commercial Operators \(/tags/commercial-operators\)](#) - [Wireless Services \(/tags/wireless-services\)](#)

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