

Problems with your Channel 65 radio check calls ?

Making a call to check your radio is one of those basic safety tests one can make before heading out to sea; in the remote possibility of a problem on board, a fully functional radio can make the difference between a rescue and a tragedy.

NCI stations are more than happy to reply to radio check calls on our working channel, 65. As an HMCG declared facility we are very pleased to help reduce the workload on HM Coastguard, and indeed the Coastguard themselves prefer that you call your nearest NCI Station on Channel 65.

During April this year the NCI Gosport station dealt with 126 radio check calls. The other NCI stations in the Solent area (Lee, Calshot, Stone Point, Needles, and Bembridge) likewise dealt with a substantial number. But occasionally check calls from boaters do unfortunately go unanswered. Why might this be ?

Firstly, as a charity, manned by volunteers, and receiving no funding from the state, we are not in a position to run a 24x7 service. Opening times vary from station to station and will be between 8am and 9am. Closing times likewise vary. So while our radio check service (and the other services we provide, such as AIS checks, weather and tide information) are provided free of charge to you, you do need to be mindful of our opening times.

Next, we do not have the extensive antenna network that HM Coastguard has available. In the main, an NCI station's antennae are on its roof. This means that we can have line-of-sight issues. It all means that there are potential transmission/reception black-spots.

Sometimes, we can just be busy. Most NCI stations continually monitor several radio channels – at Gosport these are 16, 67, 11, 65 and 0 - so it's always possible that traffic on one can distract from or take precedence over another, our main focus being on safety.

And being an organisation dedicated to maritime safety, responding to incidents will always come first. Just to give a perspective, NCI Gosport logged about 35 incidents last year, so that's 35 times we may have been too busy to reply to a radio check call.

To make a radio check call to NCI...

... Use channel 65. NCI is not licensed to transmit on other channels other than in an emergency.

... Call your closest station, and use the correct callsign. Eg Gosport NCI, Lee NCI, Calshot NCI etc. Generic calls to just 'NCI' might cause us to assume that another station will reply.

... Ensure you have line-of-sight to that station.

... Be prepared to make two or three calls before you get a reply.

But, your radio check call has gone unanswered; what to do? Please wait for a while before trying again and/or try again from a different position that has a better line of sight to the station. Or perhaps try one of the other NCI stations nearby; eg if no answer from Gosport NCI, please try calling Lee NCI.

If you still get no reply, please let the station know that there has been a problem, either by phone or email. Contact phone numbers and email addresses can be found in the station pages on our web site <https://www.nci.org.uk/>. For NCI Gosport, the number is 023 9276 5194

and the email is

gosport.dsmops@nci.org.uk

Please let us know if your vessel is a motor cruiser or a sailing yacht, and what your position was when you attempted to contact us on Channel 65 (ideally as a lat/long or as a What3Words reference).