Personal Radio Services for Keeping in Touch

Personal radio services are short-range, low-power radio communications using a device or devices that operate much like walkie-talkies. Personal radio services include one- and two-way voice services, data transmission and transmissions that operate equipment by remote control.

Personal radio services devices generally do not rely on transmission towers or other equipment. Some types of personal radio services, especially those using very high frequency (VHF) and ultra high frequency (UHF) radio spectrum, encounter significantly less static, noise and fading than CBs or walkie-talkies.

The most popular types of personal radio services are Citizens Band Radio Service (CB), Family Radio Service (FRS), General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS), Low-Power Radio Service (LPRS) and Multi-Use Radio Service (MURS). Of these types of services, only GMRS requires an FCC license to operate.

Citizens Band Radio Service

- CB service allows private, two-way radio communications for personal or business use. Communications (or attempts to communicate) with stations over 250 km (155.3 miles) away are prohibited. The maximum authorized power levels vary depending on whether the station is transmitting a single side band (SSB) or an AM signal. SSB transmissions are authorized up to 12 watts Peak Envelope Power (PEP), while AM transmissions are permitted up to four watts carrier power.
- CBs used in the United States must be FCC-certified and labeled as such by the manufacturer.
- CB service operates on 40 shared channels on a "take-turns" basis, meaning no CB channel is assigned to any specific individual or organization. Users must never talk with another station for more than 5 minutes continuously, and must wait at least one minute before starting another communication.
- You may not raise the power output of your CB unit, attach any type of power amplifier or modify the unit internally.

Family Radio Service

- FRS allows two-way voice communications over very short distances, generally less than one-half mile.
- An FRS unit looks and works much like a walkie-talkie.
- If you have a dual-use, FRS-General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) unit, you may legally use only the FRS channels unless you have a GMRS license. The label on the unit or the operations manual should indicate the service the unit is certified for. FRS-only units transmit at lower power levels and have antennas that are integrated with the unit; GMRS units transmit at higher power levels and may have detachable antennas.
- You can operate your FRS unit anywhere in the U.S. and its possessions.

General Mobile Radio Service

- GMRS is a land-mobile radio service available for short-distance, two-way communications.
- A GMRS system may legally be operated only with a license granted by the FCC. The individual licensee is responsible for the proper operation of the GMRS system.
- A GMRS system is made up of station operators and a mobile station consisting of one or more mobile units. It may also include one or more land stations. Some land stations operate as repeaters, thereby extending the range of GMRS mobile units.

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- New GMRS licenses are granted only to individuals, but GMRS licenses granted to non-individuals (such as businesses) before July 31, 1987, can be renewed if certain conditions are met. You can apply for a GMRS license online at **wireless.fcc.gov/uls/**, or by filing FCC Form 605, available at **wireless.fcc.gov/index.htm?job=all_wireless_forms**. The FCC sets license filing fees annually, and current filing fees, now $85, can be found at **wireless.fcc.gov/feesforms/feeguide/WTB Fee_Filing_Guide.pdf**. Licenses are granted for five years.

Low Power Radio Service

- LPRS is a private, one-way short-distance communication service that allows stations to transmit voice data or signals for auditory assistance to people with disabilities, people who require language translation, and certain individuals in educational settings. LPRS also allows stations to transmit voice, data, or tracking signals for health care-related communications and certain law enforcement activities. Two-way communications are prohibited. LPRS can also be used for network control communications in the Automated Marine Telecommunications System (AMTS).
- LPRS transmitters can be operated anywhere in the United States.

Multi-Use Radio Service

- MURS is a private, two-way short-distance voice or data radio communications service used for personal or business activities. The service operates on five Very High Frequency (VHF) channels.
- MURS users must cooperate in using the five channels to reduce interference to other users. No user has priority over any other user, but all users must yield to emergency communications. A MURS station may not operate as a repeater station, including store-and-forward packet radio operation, or a signal booster.
- Maximum allowable transmitter output power for a MURS unit is two watts. Transmission range between two hand-held units varies depending on the unit's antenna height, terrain and weather.

Unlicensed radio operation

Be aware that if you operate a radio transmitter that requires a license, or use a radio that is authorized for use only in a specific service, in another service, you may be fined or imprisoned, and/or the equipment may be confiscated.

Contact the FCC

- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)
- By mail:

  Federal Communications Commission
  Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
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