

DETERMINING POSITIONING STATUS OF A VMS UNIT

Question: As an owner or operator of a SkyMate, Boatracs or Thrane & Thrane VMS unit, how do I know if my VMS unit is positioning normally and sending required position reports to NMFS?

Answer:

1. SkyMate VMS. Check the GPS status by doing the following:

Click on the “**Position**” button (left side of SkyMate software screen). Next, click on the “**Position**” tab. If “**Method**” shows “**GPS**”, it means the GPS antenna and receiver are in good working order. The positional data should be valid. If “**Method**” shows “**Poor Doppler**”, it means the GPS antenna/ receiver are not functioning well and the position shown on the screen is approximated by the Doppler function built into the communicator. This approximation is unreliable. If this situation persists, check the GPS connections at this point and call SkyMate (1-866-SKYMATE) for technical support. Note - the LEDs on the SkyMate satellite communicator don’t indicate the GPS status.

2. Boatracs VMS. To make sure the Boatracs unit is positioning there is a light indicator labeled “**No Signal**” to the right of the screen. If an amber-colored light is illuminated, the unit is not positioning.

An alternate means to check is to press the “**View Status**” button and ‘down arrow’ once to check the “**M0**” value. The M0 value will have a ‘positive’ number if ‘the unit is positioning (the higher the better, but the average in the Northeast is between 13 and 18).

A final means is to call Boatracs 24-hour Client Care (1-800-262-8722) to verify positioning data, or send an e-mail request to Boatracs (support@boatrac.com) from the VMS unit. E-mail is delivered by a different satellite system; if there is a problem with positioning, e-mail capability may still be available.

3. Thrane & Thrane VMS. The “**Mobile Status**” window at the top of the screen provides several indicators that the VMS transceiver is functioning properly.

“**Connections**” provides the status of three functions by displaying a green or red light-bar: (1) “**GPS**” – whether the transceiver has acquired a GPS position; (2) “**Ant. Signal**” – whether the transceiver has acquired a satellite signal; and (3) “**PC Connect**” – whether there is a good connection between the message terminal and the transceiver. A green light-bar indicates a good connection. An intermittent red light-bar doesn’t necessarily indicate a fault; however, a permanent red light-bar may indicate that the unit is not positioning and the transceiver needs to be serviced.

To verify that the unit has sufficient power, check the LED indicators on the exterior of the interconnect (IC) box. An illuminated green LED indicates that there is sufficient power to the transceiver unit. An illuminated red LED indicates that there is DC power applied to the IC box. When both the green and red LEDs are illuminated, the unit has sufficient power. The LEDs do not indicate whether the message terminal has sufficient power.