

Privacy Tones

Almost all of the UHF CB radios sold these days include what is often referred to as “38 privacy tones”, but exactly what does this mean? What are these “privacy tones” and how do they work?

Selective Calling

To answer this question, we must first discuss a system called “Selective Calling” or “SELCALL” for short. When UHF CB was first introduced, the only form of SELCALL that was available was the type that uses a series of audible tones to call a specific radio. Each radio was given a code of usually 5 numbers (e.g. 15835) and each of these numbers referred to an audible tone. When the right tones were sent in the correct order, and using the right timing, the called radio would sound an alert to tell the user they were being called. Usually, the radio would be kept in “quiet” mode, where it wouldn’t hear anything until it received the correct tone signal.

CTCSS & DCS

The system referred to as “privacy tones” is a version of selective calling, except instead of using a series of audible tones to call a specific radio, it uses a signal that can’t be heard (often called “sub-audible tone”). This sub-audible tone is sent continuously while the radio transmits a signal, causing any radio on that channel that is set to the same tone to “hear” the signal.

CTCSS, or Continuous Tone-Coded Squelch System, uses a continuous low-frequency tone, between 67Hz and 250Hz, that is inaudible to the human ear. **DCS**, or Digital Coded Squelch, uses a digital code that is transmitted with the audible signal.

With both CTCSS and DCS, each radio is set into “quiet mode”, which very simply turns the speaker off so you don’t hear anyone that may be talking on the channel. Only when the radio hears the correct sub-audible tone or digital code will the speaker be opened, so you can hear what the other person is saying.

Not really “private”

The term “privacy tone” is a little misleading. Using these systems will NOT stop others from listening to your conversation! Anyone close by on the same channel will be able to listen to you regardless of what CTCSS or DCS tone you may be using. All these tones do is stop YOU from hearing the other stations using that channel, unless they are using the same tone that you are using.

No Tones on 5/35

The use of ANY form of selective calling, including the use of CTCSS, DCS, or “privacy tones”, is not permitted on UHF channels 5 or 35 as these are legally designated as emergency channels. Use of audible and sub-audible tones on these channels can result in heavy penalties.

More Information

- ACMA Phone: **1300 850 115**