

X. SMALL CRAFT

For the purpose of the Los Angeles and Long Beach Harbor Safety Plan, the term “small craft” includes, *inter alia*, pleasure vessels, commercial fishing vessels, sportfishing vessels, launches, commercial service vessels, and other small recreational vessels.

A. BACKGROUND: The combined harbor of Los Angeles and Long Beach is the largest shipping complex in the United States. Cruise ships, commercial cargo vessels, commercial fishing boats, power and sail recreational boats, small personal watercraft (e.g., Jet Skis™) and windsurfers share the harbor waterways. With all its boating activity, this harbor still ranks as one of the world’s safest.

The LA/LB Harbors handle more than 4,500 commercial vessel arrivals per year (excluding local coastwise and Catalina Island traffic).

Based upon marina slips and land storage capacities, more than 10,000 recreational vessels between 20’ and 70’ moor in the harbors. Commercial business and transient shipping within the harbor averages about 1,500 vessels monthly.

The Committee recognizes the need for commercial traffic to share the waterways with small craft, but at the same time we must provide safe transit for vessels in shipping channels and the approach areas, where a large vessel has limited options for avoiding small craft.

The areas of principal concern are LA/LB Harbors’ delineated navigation channels, breakwater entrances, pilot boarding areas and an area in the final approach to the pilot boarding areas and the Marine Terminal at El Segundo.

A Regulated Navigation Area (RNA) covers the pilot boarding areas of each port, Anchorage Area G (outside the middle breakwater) and the Precautionary Area out to the three-mile limit.

Federal Regulations regarding vessels operating within a RNA include:

- 1. No vessel may enter the pilot boarding area of either port unless entering or leaving the port through the breakwater entrance.**
- 2. Vessels entering either pilot boarding area shall pass directly through without stopping or loitering unless necessary to embark or debark a pilot.**

The U. S. Coast Guard has interpreted loitering in the pilot boarding area as follows:

Vessels fishing in these areas are ‘loitering’ within the meaning of the regulation. Fishing vessels wishing to use the areas in the vicinity of the Gates seaward of the breakwater should fish outside of the pilot boarding areas, and under no circumstances loiter in the Gates. (*See*, Coast Guard LNTM 42-86).

In a continuing effort to minimize the risk of marine casualties, the Committee has developed Standards of Care (safe operating practices) for the LA/LB port area and seaward approaches outside the breakwater, including the Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) and Traffic Lanes. It is recommended that operators of small craft follow these Standards of Care.

Small craft, 1,100' supertankers and fast containerships, tugs with barges in tow, high speed ferries, and other commercial vessels share the Los Angeles and Long Beach (LA/LB) waterways and seaward approaches. Besides operating in a congested environment, these vessels at times encounter restricted visibility (e.g., fog) that, if not addressed adequately, can increase navigation difficulty, and elevate collision risk. Small craft operators should be aware that large vessels cannot stop or alter course quickly and, therefore, may have difficulty avoiding a collision with smaller, more maneuverable vessels. Crews of larger commercial vessels also have difficulty seeing smaller vessels because containers carried on deck often create blind spots that may extend more than 1/2 mile ahead.

The Committee encourages local efforts to educate small craft operators regarding the potential hazards to both themselves and other vessels when operating in the LA/LB harbor area, in the port approaches, and near large commercial vessels. Coast Guard, Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron units are available to communicate with and explain these Standards of Care to small craft owners/operators. These local initiatives are aimed at minimizing navigational conflicts between small craft and commercial vessels.

B. STANDARDS OF CARE FOR SMALL CRAFT OPERATING IN THE LA/LB PORT AREA

1. Ensure your vessel is safe: Before getting underway, you should ensure that all required safety equipment is on board and is operational and serviceable, i.e., personal flotation devices (life jackets), throwable flotation devices, flares, fog horns, fire extinguishers, etc. You should also verify that the vessel's batteries are fully charged, and running lights/day shapes are operational. Understanding the proper use of all this equipment, by both you and other vessels, is critical to your safety.
2. Ensure your vessel is seaworthy: Prevailing conditions in the LA/LB harbor area and approaches include heavy seas caused by offshore storms and large wakes developed by high-speed ferries, crew/supply boats, ship assist tugs, and large commercial vessels. Operators of vessels designed primarily for protected waters (e.g., canoes, paddleboards, etc.) should exercise caution in and around the port area.
3. Keep flares and distress calling equipment handy: Being disabled in an area used by large commercial vessels can be extremely hazardous. You should be able to quickly locate and use signaling flares and the VHF radio, to seek immediate help or notify other vessels.
4. Observe the Navigation Rules (the Rules of the Road) and in particular Rule 9: Rule 9 states (among other things) that vessels less than 20 meters in length, or sailing vessels, or a vessel engaged in fishing shall not impede the passage of a vessel which can safely

navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway. A good way to comply with this Rule is to avoid operating in the middle of navigable channels.

5. Avoid interfering with pilot boat operations: Large commercial vessels are limited in their ability to maneuver while boarding and disembarking pilots.
6. Avoid passing larger vessels close aboard: Avoid crossing in front of or passing larger commercial vessels close aboard, riding the bow wave (sailboards/personal watercraft), or passing between the dock and a berthing ship. Additionally, do not pass close to the stern of large vessels, as their propeller wash and suction create considerable turbulence.
7. Pass tugboats with caution: Tugboats often tow barges behind or alongside, and as a result are limited in their ability to maneuver. Often you may not be able to see a barge in tow because it can be one (1) mile or farther astern of the tug. And submerged tow wires can pose a hazard if you pass between the tug and its tow. Such encounters have caused serious damage and injury to boaters.
8. Know the locations of Traffic Separation Schemes (TSS), traffic lanes, and Regulated Navigational Areas (RNA): Small craft operators should know where large commercial vessels regularly operate and avoid those areas, especially at night or during restricted visibility. If you must operate in these areas, pay particular attention to nearby large vessels and maneuver clear of their tracks. Loitering, fishing or anchoring in the harbor entrances dangerously restricts the movement of vessels while maneuvering inbound and outbound from these large port complexes.
9. Maintain a listening watch on VHF radio: Small craft are encouraged to monitor these radio channels to remain apprised of commercial vessel movements and important mariner safety notices. Be prepared to respond if a commercial vessel calls to alert another mariner that a dangerous situation is developing.

Location	Bridge-to-bridge frequency	Vessel Traffic Service frequency
Outside Federal Breakwater:		VHF 14
Port of Long Beach:	VHF 13	VHF 12
Port of Los Angeles:	VHF 13	VHF 73

VHF Channel 16 is the international distress, safety and calling frequency.

10. Always know your vessel's position: It is recommended that all small craft be equipped with a GPS receiver and a marine AIS (Automatic Identification System). Accurate position information with GPS and AIS will assist with navigation and collision avoidance. Importantly, accurate position information from GPS and AIS allows responders to find you more easily and quickly during an emergency.
11. Be an informed mariner: It is a good marine practice to know the Rules of the Road and to stay current with the safety tips and articles provided by local maritime magazines and

Coast Guard Notices to Mariners. Notices to Mariners provide information on port construction projects (dredging, breakwater expansion, shallow water habitat construction, etc.), aid to navigation (AtoN) changes, bridge closures, and other physical conditions affecting marine safety. You should also monitor NOAA maritime weather broadcasts (VHF WX 1) and Coast Guard Broadcast Notice To Mariners (VHF Channel 16). They provide information about heavy seas, high winds, fog, or AtoN discrepancies that might otherwise threaten a safe voyage. You are also encouraged to log onto the local Coast Guard's homepage, <https://homeport.uscg.mil/port-directory/los-angeles-long-beach> for the most current safety information.

12. Emergency procedures: In addition to crewmembers, small craft often carry visitors, paying customers and/or fishing enthusiasts. It is vitally important for the safety of everyone aboard that vessel owners/operators train their crew in emergency procedures (Man Overboard, Fire, Abandon Ship, and Distress), and in the proper use of the VHF radio and emergency signaling devices. Vessel operators should also consider appointing a competent person to assume command in the event of his/her incapacitation.

C. STANDARDS OF CARE FOR SMALL CRAFT OPERATING IN THE LA/LB PORT AREA DURING TIMES OF RESTRICTED VISIBILITY: Large commercial vessels sometimes have difficulty detecting small craft on their radar equipment. When small craft are navigated in the federal channels during times of restricted visibility, the risk of collision increases, and small craft operators should adopt additional safety precautions.

1. Be extra careful in restricted visibility (e.g., fog): Operators of small craft should carefully evaluate the elevated risks associated with navigating during times when visibility is restricted. It is recommended that small craft operators should not get underway during times of restricted visibility unless their vessel is radar-equipped and the person directing the vessel's movement is proficient at observing and interpreting radar information.

Extreme caution should be exercised when deciding whether to operate a small craft during restricted visibility conditions. Restricted visibility leaves very little time/sea room to visually detect another vessel, assess the collision risk, and take action to avoid collision. This is especially true if you are in a larger vessel's blind spot, and/or approaching a larger vessel that cannot maneuver to avoid a collision.

2. Use a radar reflector and AIS: Since fog conditions often develop quickly and unexpectedly, it is recommended that small craft operators carry and use radar reflectors and AIS (Automatic Identification System), which help large commercial vessels and Vessel Traffic Service detect small vessels on their radar and navigation equipment.
3. Maintain an accurate vessel position: Position keeping becomes particularly important when navigating in restricted visibility. Electronic positioning equipment, such as a GPS receiver, should be used to fix the vessel's position and monitor the vessel's intended track.
4. Speed is a critical factor in your ability to avoid a collision in restricted visibility. Your speed must be reduced to match the existing conditions. For your reference, a vessel

moving at 10 knots covers 600 feet in 36 seconds. With 600 feet of visibility, when another vessel is approaching you on a collision course at the same 10 knots, you both have 18 seconds to take action after sighting each other visually.

5. The practice of loitering in the harbor entrances or anywhere in mid-channel can be dangerous and should be avoided, particularly during times of restricted visibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Committee recommends that owners/operators of small craft avail themselves of the numerous educational courses being offered by the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Power Squadron and the California Department of Boating and Waterways. It is highly recommended that individuals who rent pleasure boats show proof of having taken and passed one of these courses. The rental agency in addition, should have renters demonstrate knowledge of the Rules of the Road, basic safety procedures and regulations about operating a vessel under the influence of alcohol and/or other drugs.
2. The Committee recommends that owners/operators of small craft familiarize themselves with:
 - The applicable nautical charts for the area
<https://charts.noaa.gov/InteractiveCatalog/nrnc.shtml>
 - International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (72 COLREGS) and the U.S. inland navigation Rules
<https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/navRules/navrules.pdf>
 - U.S. Coast Pilot #7 https://nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/publications/coast-pilot/files/cp7/CPB7_WEB.pdf
 - Los Angeles Long Beach Harbor Safety Plan <https://mxsocial.org/hsc-safety-plan/>
 - Vessel Traffic Service LA-LB (VTS LA-LB) User Manual
<https://mxsocial.org/assets/pdf/vts-user-manual-210331.pdf>
 - Pamphlet – A Guide to Boater Safety
 - Pamphlet – Rule 9 & 5 . . . Laws to Live By
 - California Boater Card <https://californiaboatercard.com>
 - Inbound Mariner Resources on MX SoCal Web Site
<https://mxsocial.org/resources/#imr>

Additional resources may be found at: <https://mxsocial.org>