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161.23 Reporting exemptions.

Subpart C—Vessel Traffic Service and Vessel Movement Reporting System Areas and Reporting Points

- 161.25 Vessel Traffic Service New York Area.
- 161.30 Vessel Traffic Service Louisville.
- 161.35 Vessel Traffic Service Houston/Galveston.
- 161.40 Vessel Traffic Service Berwick Bay.
- 161.45 Vessel Traffic Service St. Marys River.
- 161.50 Vessel Traffic Service San Francisco.
- 161.55 Vessel Traffic Service Puget Sound and the Cooperative Vessel Traffic Service for the Juan de Fuca Region.
- 161.60 Vessel Traffic Service Prince William Sound.
- 161.65 Vessel Traffic Service Lower Mississippi River.
- 161.70 Vessel Traffic Service Port Arthur.

AUTHORITY: 46 U.S.C. 70001, 70002, 70003, 70034, 70114, 70119; Pub. L. 107-295, 116 Stat. 2064; Department of Homeland Security Delegation No. 0170.1.

SOURCE: CGD 90-020, 59 FR 36324, July 15, 1994, unless otherwise noted.

Subpart A—Vessel Traffic Services

GENERAL RULES

§ 161.1 Purpose and Intent.

(a) The purpose of this part is to promulgate regulations implementing and enforcing certain sections of the 46 U.S.C. Chapter 700 “Ports and Waterways Safety setting up a national system of Vessel Traffic Services that will enhance navigation, vessel safety, and marine environmental protection, and promote safe vessel movement by reducing the potential for collisions, rammings, and groundings, and the loss of lives and property associated with these incidents within VTS areas established hereunder.

(b) Vessel Traffic Services provide the mariner with information related to the safe navigation of a waterway. This information, coupled with the mariner’s compliance with the provisions set forth in this part, enhances the safe routing of vessels through congested waterways or waterways of particular hazard. Under certain circumstances, a VTS may issue directions to control the movement of vessels in order to minimize the risk of

collision between vessels, or damage to property or the environment.

(c) The owner, operator, charterer, master, or person directing the movement of a vessel remains at all times responsible for the manner in which the vessel is operated and maneuvered, and is responsible for the safe navigation of the vessel under all circumstances. Compliance with these rules or with a direction of the VTS is at all times contingent upon the exigencies of safe navigation.

(d) Nothing in this part is intended to relieve any vessel, owner, operator, charterer, master, or person directing the movement of a vessel from the consequences of any neglect to comply with this part or any other applicable law or regulation (e.g., the International Regulations for Prevention of Collisions at Sea, 1972 (72 COLREGS) or the Inland Navigation Rules) or of the neglect of any precaution which may be required by the ordinary practice of seamen, or by the special circumstances of the case.

[CGD 90-020, 59 FR 36324, July 15, 1994, as amended by USCG-2020-0304, 85 FR 58280, Sept. 18, 2020]

§ 161.2 Definitions.

For the purposes of this part:

Center means a Vessel Traffic Center or Vessel Movement Center.

Cooperative Vessel Traffic Services (CVTS) means the system of vessel traffic management established and jointly operated by the United States and Canada within adjoining waters. In addition, CVTS facilitates traffic movement and anchorages, avoids jurisdictional disputes, and renders assistance in emergencies in adjoining United States and Canadian waters.

Hazardous Vessel Operating Condition means any condition related to a vessel’s ability to safely navigate or maneuver, and includes, but is not limited to:

(1) The absence or malfunction of vessel operating equipment, such as propulsion machinery, steering gear, radar system, gyrocompass, depth sounding device, automatic radar plotting aid (ARPA), radiotelephone, Automatic Identification System equipment, navigational lighting, sound signaling devices or similar equipment.

(2) Any condition on board the vessel likely to impair navigation, such as lack of current nautical charts and publications, personnel shortage, or similar condition.

(3) Vessel characteristics that affect or restrict maneuverability, such as cargo or tow arrangement, trim, loaded condition, underkeel or overhead clearance, speed capabilities, power availability, or similar characteristics, which may affect the positive control or safe handling of the vessel or the tow.

Navigable waters means all navigable waters of the United States including the territorial sea of the United States, extending to 12 nautical miles from United States baselines, as described in Presidential Proclamation No. 5928 of December 27, 1988.

Precautionary Area means a routing measure comprising an area within defined limits where vessels must navigate with particular caution and within which the direction of traffic may be recommended.

Towing Vessel means any commercial vessel engaged in towing another vessel astern, alongside, or by pushing ahead.

Published means available in a widely-distributed and publicly available medium (e.g., VTS User's Manual, ferry schedule, Notice to Mariners).

Vessel Movement Center (VMC) means the shore-based facility that operates the vessel tracking system for a Vessel Movement Reporting System (VMRS) area or zone within such an area. The VMC does not necessarily have the capability or qualified personnel to interact with marine traffic, nor does it necessarily respond to traffic situations developing in the area, as does a Vessel Traffic Service (VTS).

Vessel Movement Reporting System (VMRS) means a mandatory reporting system used to monitor and track vessel movements. This is accomplished by a vessel providing information under established procedures as set forth in this part in the areas defined in Table 161.12(c) (VTS and VMRS Centers, Call Signs/MMSI, Designated Frequencies, and Monitoring Areas).

Vessel Movement Reporting System (VMRS) User means a vessel, or an owner, operator, charterer, Master, or person directing the movement of a

vessel that is required to participate in a VMRS.

Vessel Traffic Center (VTC) means the shore-based facility that operates the vessel traffic service for the Vessel Traffic Service area or zone within such an area.

Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) means a service implemented by the United States Coast Guard designed to improve the safety and efficiency of vessel traffic and to protect the environment. The VTS has the capability to interact with marine traffic and respond to traffic situations developing in the VTS area.

Vessel Traffic Service Area or VTS Area means the geographical area encompassing a specific VTS area of service. This area of service may be subdivided into zones for the purpose of allocating responsibility to individual Vessel Traffic Centers or to identify different operating requirements.

NOTE: Although regulatory jurisdiction is limited to the navigable waters of the United States, certain vessels will be encouraged or may be required, as a condition of port entry, to report beyond this area to facilitate traffic management within the VTS area.

VTS Special Area means a waterway within a VTS area in which special operating requirements apply.

VTS User means a vessel or an owner, operator, charterer, Master, or person directing the movement of a vessel within a VTS Area that is:

- (1) Subject to the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act;
- (2) Required to participate in a VMRS; or
- (3) Equipped with a required Coast Guard type-approved Automatic Identification System (AIS).

VTS User's Manual means the manual established and distributed by the VTS to provide the mariner with a description of the services offered and rules in force for that VTS. Additionally, the manual may include chartlets showing the area and zone boundaries, general navigational information about the area, and procedures, radio frequencies,

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reporting provisions and other information which may assist the mariner while in the VTS area.

[CGD 90-020, 59 FR 36324, July 15, 1994, as amended by CGE 97-023, 62 FR 33364, June 19, 1997; USCG-2003-14757, 68 FR 39364, July 1, 2003; USCG-1998-4399, 75 FR 66314, Oct. 28, 2010; USCG-2005-21869, 80 FR 5334, Jan. 30, 2015; 80 FR 17327, Apr. 1, 2015; USCG-2018-0874, 84 FR 30880, June 28, 2019]

§ 161.3 Applicability.

The provisions of this subpart shall apply to each VTS User and may also apply to any vessel while underway or at anchor on the navigable waters of the United States within a VTS area, to the extent the VTS considers necessary.

§ 161.4 Requirement to carry the rules.

Each VTS User shall carry on board and maintain for ready reference a copy of these rules.

NOTE 1 TO § 161.4: These rules are contained in the applicable U.S. Coast Pilot, the VTS User's Manual which may be obtained by contacting the appropriate VTS or downloaded from the Coast Guard Navigation Center website (<https://www.navcen.uscg.gov>).

[CGD 90-020, 59 FR 36324, July 15, 1994, as amended by USCG-2018-0874, 84 FR 30880, June 28, 2019]

§ 161.5 Deviations from the rules.

(a) Requests to deviate from any provision in this part, either for an extended period of time or if anticipated before the start of a transit, must be submitted in writing to the appropriate District Commander. Upon receipt of the written request, the District Commander may authorize a deviation if it is determined that such a deviation provides a level of safety equivalent to that provided by the required measure or is a maneuver considered necessary for safe navigation under the circumstances. An application for an authorized deviation must state the need and fully describe the proposed alternative to the required measure.

(b) Requests to deviate from any provision in this part due to circumstances that develop during a transit or immediately preceding a transit may be made to the appropriate VTC. Requests to deviate must be made as

far in advance as practicable. Upon receipt of the request, the VTC may authorize a deviation if it is determined that, based on vessel handling characteristics, traffic density, radar contacts, environmental conditions and other relevant information, such a deviation provides a level of safety equivalent to that provided by the required measure or is a maneuver considered necessary for safe navigation under the circumstances.

[CGD 90-020, 59 FR 36324, July 15, 1994, as amended by USCG-2005-21531, 70 FR 36350, June 23, 2005; USCG-2005-21869, 80 FR 5334, Jan. 30, 2015; USCG-2018-0874, 84 FR 30880, June 28, 2019]

§ 161.6 Preemption.

The regulations in this part have preemptive impact over State laws or regulations on the same subject matter. The Coast Guard has determined, after considering the factors developed by the Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Locke*, 529 U.S. 89 (2000), that by enacting 46 U.S.C. Chapter 700 'Ports and Waterways Safety', Congress intended that Coast Guard regulations preempt State laws or regulations regarding vessel traffic services in United States ports and waterways.

[USCG-1998-4399, 75 FR 66314, Oct. 28, 2010, as amended by USCG-2020-0304, 85 FR 58280, Sept. 18, 2020]

SERVICES, VTS MEASURES, AND OPERATING REQUIREMENTS

§ 161.10 Services.

To enhance navigation and vessel safety, and to protect the marine environment, a VTS may issue advisories, or respond to vessel requests for information, on reported conditions within the VTS area, such as:

- (a) Hazardous conditions or circumstances;
- (b) Vessel congestion;
- (c) Traffic density;
- (d) Environmental conditions;
- (e) Aids to navigation status;
- (f) Anticipated vessel encounters;
- (g) Another vessel's name, type, position, hazardous vessel operating conditions, if applicable, and intended navigation movements, as reported;
- (h) Temporary measures in effect;