

SMALL VESSEL SAFETY IN THE LOS ANGELES/LONG BEACH HARBORS

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 5,500 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 to share the waterways with local fishermen and recreational and pleasure boaters, but at the same time we must provide safe transit for vessels in 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 Terminals 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.

Some requirements 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:

"Fishermen 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 regulated area, and under no circumstances loiter in the Gates." (Coast Guard LNTM 42-86).

Many recreational boaters are not aware that large commercial vessels have limited maneuverability, resulting in "close quarters" situations. Some personal watercraft riders ride the bow wave of commercial vessels, creating a high risk of incidents that could involve death or property loss.

Recreation vessels should always avoid:

1. Crossing ahead dangerously close to ships;
2. Operating in the middle of the navigable channel;
3. Passing between the dock and a berthing ship;
4. Fishing or anchoring in pilot boarding areas;
5. Failing to understand whistle signals (passing, fog and danger signals);
6. Failing to display proper lights (night) and shapes (day);
7. Being unaware of compass heading or position; and
8. Operating at speeds unsafe for the prevailing conditions.

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