



Coast Guard Sector Houston-Galveston Marine Safety Information Bulletin 05-23

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Vessel Traffic Service Area Vessel Requirements

The Captain of the Port (COTP) Houston-Galveston has received reports of vessels underway in the Vessel Traffic Service Area (VTSA) with a main engine unable to immediately achieve maximum revolutions as requested by the Pilot on board. During our review of these matters, it was determined that the main engines were in good working order, but were unable to answer the full range of commands because of some type of automatic acceleration-limiting program that prevented the main engine from responding immediately.

Owner/Operators and Ship Masters are reminded that before embarking a Pilot when entering or getting underway in the navigable waters of the VTSA, main propulsion machinery should be available to immediately respond to the full range of maneuvering commands and that any load-limiting programs or automatic acceleration-limiting programs that would limit the speed of response to engine orders beyond that needed to prevent immediate damage to propulsion machinery are capable of being overridden immediately. Prior to entering the VTSA, the attending Pilot should be provided information on how any load-limiting programs or automatic acceleration-limiting programs effect the operation of the main propulsion plant and the mechanism/procedure used to override the system should that become necessary for safe navigation.

Furthermore, each self-propelled vessel of 1,600 or more gross tons subject to 33 CFR Part 164 should also attempt to comply with the following:

1. While underway in the VTSA, each vessel should have an engineering watch capable of monitoring the propulsion system, communicating to the bridge, and implementing manual control measures immediately when necessary. The watch should be physically present in the machinery spaces or in the machinery-control spaces and should consist of at least a licensed engineer.
2. While underway in the VTSA, each vessel should pay due regard to Navigation Rule (COLREGS) 6, Safe Speed: "Every vessel shall at all times proceed at a safe speed so that she can take proper and effective action to avoid collision and be stopped within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions." Due regard to operating in a narrow channel should also be considered: negative hydrodynamic effects such as bank suction/cushion, sheer, and depth of the channel being prone to shoaling should be taken into consideration. Vessels should operate in such a manner as to have normal operating speed in reserve in times of extremis. The disabling of load limiting devices should be considered when reserve speed is not effective in maintaining safe navigation.

In addition, the Master should ensure the Chief Engineer of the vessel has certified that the main propulsion plant is in all respects ready for operations including the main propulsion air-start systems, fuel systems, lubricating systems, cooling systems, and automation systems, that cooling, lubricating, and fuel-oil systems are at proper operating temperatures, and that main-propulsion standby systems are ready to be immediately placed in service.

Please contact the Sector Houston-Galveston WWM Division via houstonwwm@uscg.mil or the Command Center at 281-464-4851 if you have any questions or comments.

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Captain, United States Coast Guard
Captain of the Port