

Sector Houston-Galveston
Marine Safety Information Bulletin
MSIB 10-10

Maintaining a Proper Lookout

July 26, 2010

A review of recent marine casualties has determined the failure to adhere to proper look-out procedures is a leading contributing factor. Sector Houston-Galveston seeks to reiterate the legal requirement and general expectations for vessels to maintain proper look-outs within the restricted maneuverability conditions of the Houston Ship Channel.

The Inland Navigation Rules, 33 USC § 2005 (Rule 5) states: "Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision." This rule is reinforced by the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping Chapter VIII, Section A-VIII/2, Part 3.

The responsibility for maintaining a proper look-out lies with a vessel's operator. It involves detecting, analyzing and communicating information regarding a vessel's surroundings in a timely manner, and should be viewed as a systematic collection of information rather than reliance on one person. Sector Houston-Galveston expects all vessel operators to consider the following when employing look-outs:

- ✓ Implement proven bridge team management practices. Fostering a sense of participation through interchange of information, thorough briefings and regular training helps to maintain interest, motivation and vigilance;
- ✓ The operator must determine the best position for a look-out based upon vessel characteristics, height of eye-level and the presence of blind spots. Containers, cranes and other gear may partially block full view from the bridge. The general recommendation is that the bow is the appropriate place for the lookout assigned to best use visual and hearing senses;
- ✓ All look-outs need to be experienced, well trained and thoroughly briefed on every occasion before taking up their duty;
- ✓ All look-outs shall be adequately rested and appropriately dressed for the weather;
- ✓ Assigned look-outs must be vigilant, alert, constantly attentive and free of distraction - **they shall have no other duties or assignments, which could interfere with their task**, i.e., a crewmember assigned to supervise line handling during mooring operations or standing by to release anchors cannot serve as the look-out;

Sector Houston-Galveston

- ✓ The look-out must have immediate and reliable communications with the watch officer;
- ✓ Items to report include, but are not limited to: lights, sounds, echoes, and obstructions; and
- ✓ Look-out reports should be acknowledged by a watch officer. If not acknowledged, reports should be repeated by the look-out until they are acknowledged.

Duties of the look-out and helmsman are separate. The helmsman should not be considered a look-out except on small vessels where an unobstructed all round view is provided at the steering position and there is no impairment of night vision or other impediment to the keeping of a proper look-out.

Courts have stated that the rule of maintaining a proper look-out is one of the strictest rules in admiralty law and must be given the highest consideration and attention. The Sector Houston-Galveston Prevention Department, Investigation Division is available to assist with concerns or questions regarding this bulletin and may be reached at (713) 678-9025.



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