



Coast Guard Sector Houston-Galveston Marine Safety Information Bulletin 14-16

UNDER-KEEL CLEARANCE AT WATERFRONT FACILITIES HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEYS

Operators of waterfront facilities are encouraged conduct quarterly depth soundings in the vicinity of their docks and berths to ensure there is sufficient under-keel clearance to safely accommodate vessels calling at these facilities. All vessels shall remain afloat at all times within the Port of Houston and the Port of Galveston, including while moored at facilities, except as provided below. The Lone Star Harbor Safety Committee has published guidance entitled *Best Practices for Berthing Area Surveys*, which has bearing on the topic. Additional guidance can be found in the 2012 edition of *Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF)*. The OCIMF encouraged operators of waterfront facilities to develop documented processes to ensure adequate water depth for vessels conducting cargo and other operations at their facilities and also addressed terminal procedures for surveying and dredging necessary to maintain approach channels and water depth alongside docks and berths.

Current, accurate hydrographic soundings facilitate both cargo operations and navigational safety. Accurate survey data is critical to cargo loading decisions and determination of maximum safe draft and should be provided to vessels scheduled to call at waterfront facilities, harbor pilots and vessel agents for use in voyage planning and cargo loading operations. Accurate survey data significantly reduces the risk of grounding and may prevent unnecessary delays that could impede cargo operations and disrupt vessel departure plans. Potential grounding-related delays include, but are not limited to; marine casualty investigations, damage assessments and repairs, and class surveys.

Additionally, waterfront facility operators are encouraged to conduct depth surveys before and after a hurricane or major weather event, to include flooding. Navigational safety is potentially at greater risk during winter months as water depths in the Houston Ship Channel and adjacent waters can be significantly affected by strong northerly winds. Hydrographic survey data often provides definitive evidence necessary to support funding proposals for post-storm dredging and mitigation of navigational obstructions as well as to access to Federal disaster relief funds. Timely survey data can also substantiate insurance claims associated with storm-related damage and losses.

Mariners are reminded of their obligations set forth in 33 CFR 160.215 to report to the Coast Guard hazardous conditions which affect the safe movement of vessels, including inaccurate survey data and shoaling in the vicinity of privately owned berths and docks. Mariners are similarly reminded of their obligation to expeditiously report all marine casualties to the Coast Guard, in accordance with Title 46 CFR Part 4; to include all groundings, with the exception of intentional barge groundings that do not impede traffic or hazard the safety of the barge.

The port community will keep local waterways open for commerce and operating at peak capacity only with the cooperation and compliance of all its members. I welcome your attention to this important safety concern. Please direct any questions or concerns regarding this information bulletin to LCDR Navin Griffin via telephone (281) 464-4736 or via email Navin.L.Griffin@uscg.mil.

This bulletin shall remain active until rescinded or superseded by future direction.


P. F. Martin

Captain, United States Coast Guard
Captain of the Port