

2008 Harbor Safety Committee of the Year Nominee

Harbor Safety Committee Name: Harbor Safety Committee of the San Francisco Bay Region

2008 was exceptionally active for the Harbor Safety Committee of the San Francisco Bay Region. In November 2007, the container ship Cosco Busan struck the Bay Bridge in dense fog, spilling 53,000 gallons of oil, with damage to the ship, bridge fendering, and the environment. Spill clean-up costs totaled \$70 million.

Governor Schwarzenegger directed the state to analyze the allision and develop recommendations addressing vessel movements. The Office of Spill Prevention and Response assigned the Harbor Safety Committee (HSC) to report to the Governor on preventing similar vessel accidents. The HSC report findings and recommendations also informed the National Transportation Safety Review Board (NTSB) incident investigation.

At the same time the Committee through its five Work Groups held months of public meetings with extensive discussion by the maritime community, adopting a series of Best Maritime Practice Guidelines to enhance navigation safety. Since the base cause of the allision was human error, these guidelines focus on vessels operating in limited visibility, as San Francisco is one of the foggiest harbors in the U.S. with eleven bridges over shipping lanes. The guidelines are now published in the U.S. Coast Pilot, the Coast Guard Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Manual, the Bar Pilots Operations Manual and the San Francisco Harbor Safety Plan. We note the guidelines are not meant to relieve the mariner of responsibility to follow applicable rules and regulations addressing prudent seamanship.

These self-enforced guidelines have been a great success. Over the succeeding months of transits, VTS found it necessary to use its authority to enforce compliance on only two occasions.

Highlights:

- Guidelines for Vessels Over 1600 Gross Tons Navigating in Reduced Visibility. Reduced visibility was a causal factor in the Cosco Busan incident. The San Francisco Bay Region is a series of microclimates with variable fog conditions. The new guidelines advise that vessels not commence transits if visibility is less than 0.5 miles at the dock; underway vessels should anchor if visibility at the destination is less than 0.5 miles; and additional care is advised when transiting designated Critical Maneuvering Areas where the channel is restricted, et al.
- Guidelines for Vessels Over 1600 Gross Tons Navigating in Severe Weather Conditions. Winter storms bring high winds and adverse sea conditions that may cause the San Francisco Bar Channel be closed to vessel traffic. The guidelines list a number of factors to consider when closing the Bar or limiting transits in the Bay.
- Guidelines for Tugs with Tows and Commute Ferries Navigating in Reduced Visibility and in Severe Weather Conditions. Similar guidelines were adopted for other vessels in the Bay, as the region is an active mix of high-speed commute ferries, tankers, container ships, tugs with tows, and recreational boaters.
- Guidelines for the Use of Simulator Training for Tanker Escort Crews and for Tug Assist and Docking Other Large Vessels. The Tug Escort Work Group is exploring the opportunity for maritime simulators to replicate local conditions to conduct emergency training for pilots and tug personnel. We are reaching out to encourage industry to use this soon-to-be available training tool.
- Recommendation to State Board of Pilot Commissioners. The HSC urged the Board to require that licensed pilots be equipped and trained in the use of Portable Pilot Units.