

# TUG ESCORT WORK GROUP

From: Captain Fred Henning, Work Group Chair  
Subject: Recommended addition to Harbor Safety Plan addressing best practices for tugs with tows less than 1600GT during reduced visibility  
Date: January 15, 2009

## Introduction

The Tug Escort Work Group met January 15, 2009 to address issues related to navigating San Francisco Bay in inclement weather, specifically, those affecting tugs with tows under 1600GT transiting during reduced visibility.

## Context

Navigating the San Francisco Bay Region during periods of reduced visibility requires mariners to exercise additional caution and vigilance. The Bay region, consisting of several bays and rivers, is one of the foggiest harbors in the United States. In-Bay distances are long. There is not a single regional climate, but a series of microclimates with variable fog. During summer, 30 to 40 percent of parts of the Bay may experience foggy conditions. In winter, the fog may be denser, originating from a different direction than summer fog.

## Recommended Guidelines for Navigating in Reduced Visibility

These best practices should be used by the mariner when planning, initiating or navigating a transit in the Bay during periods of reduced visibility. They acknowledge that the size of a tug and tow have much to do with their maneuverability, and therefore, are limited to tugs with tows with a combined displacement of less than 1600GT. Finally, the best practices are meant to serve as guidelines, and are not meant to relieve the mariner of his or her responsibility to follow applicable rules and regulations addressing prudent seamanship including the requirement of the International Regulations for Avoiding Collisions at Sea, or COLREGS.

**Critical Maneuvering Areas (CMAs):** There are areas within the Bay where additional standards of care are required due to the restrictive nature of the channel, proximity of hazards, or the prevalence of adverse currents. Tugs with tows should not transit through CMAs when visibility is less than 0.25 nautical miles. Tugs with tows in petroleum service should not transit through CMAs when visibility is less than 0.5 nautical miles.

Locations within the Bay identified as Critical Maneuvering Areas:

Redwood Creek

San Mateo-Hayward Bridge  
Oakland Bar Channel\*  
Islais Creek Channel  
Richmond Inner Harbor  
Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, East Span  
Union Pacific Bridge  
New York Slough, up-bound  
Rio Vista Lift Bridge

\*Note: the Oakland Bar Channel is identified due to cross currents and its proximity to the Bay Bridge and Yerba Buena Island.

**Vessels docked:** Tugs with tows at a dock within the Bay should not commence a movement if visibility is less than 0.25 nautical miles at the dock. Tugs with tows in petroleum service at a dock within the Bay should not commence a movement if visibility is less than 0.5 nautical miles at the dock.

**Vessels proceeding to dock:** Tugs with tows proceeding to a dock should anchor if visibility at the dock is known to be less than 0.25 nautical miles, unless, under all circumstances, proceeding to the dock is the safest option. Tugs with tows in petroleum service proceeding to a dock should anchor if visibility at the dock is known to be less than 0.5 nautical miles, unless, under all circumstances, proceeding to the dock is the safest option.

Note: Vessel captains or operators should notify VTS upon determination that a scheduled movement will be delayed or cancelled. If underway, they shall make a sailing plan deviation report per VTS regulations.

**Tug Escort Recommendations to the Harbor Safety Committee:**

1. The Work Group recommends that the “Guidelines for Navigating in Reduced Visibility for Tugs with Tows Less Than 1600GT” be added to the San Francisco Harbor Safety Plan.
2. The Work Group recommends the Harbor Safety Committee review the “Guidelines for Navigating in Reduced Visibility for Tugs with Tows Less Than 1600GT” within one year of adoption.