

Small Passenger Vessels - Ferries: Recommended Guidelines for Navigating in Reduced Visibility and Severe Weather

Safety Practices

The Master of a ferry is the person in charge of the vessel, responsible for the safety of the passengers and crew at all times, and has the authority to decide if it is safe to get underway or to proceed.

In reduced visibility and inclement weather conditions, the following practices are followed:

- A go or no-go decision to get underway is made by the vessel Master or the company Operation Manager, based on conditions along the entire route, using all available information including the experience of the master and operations manager.
- Look-outs: the vessel Master assigns crewmembers for look-out duty based on the existing or anticipated conditions; the applicable regulations are found in the Navigation Rules and Regulations, Rule 5 Look-out (text attached).
- Safe speed: the vessel is required to proceed at a speed appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions, which include state of visibility and the manageability of the vessel with special reference to stopping distance and turning ability. Other factors include participation in fixed ferry routes, wind advisories issued by NOAA, sea state, traffic density, and applicable Navigation Rules and Regulations (see attached verbiage from Rule 6 Safe Speed).
- Equipment: each Ferry is required to have at minimum one radar; commuter ferry vessels generally have two operational radars onboard; the vessel Master is required to have a radar observer license endorsement. Global Positioning Satellite, Automatic Identification System and Electronic Charting navigation systems are also installed and used to assist navigation.

In conditions of high wind and waves:

- Go/no-go decision is made by the vessel Master or the company Operation Manager, based on conditions along the entire route, using all available information including the experience of the master and operations manager. Factors to be considered include size of the vessel, direction of the winds and seas, orientation of departure and arrival piers to prevailing conditions, and limitations of ferries to travel at slower speeds.
- Passenger safety: Captain can maneuver the vessel to minimize wave effects. Crew duties include rough weather announcements and passenger safety management.

High Speed Ferry Operations (over 30 Knots)

U.S. Coast Guard Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circulars (NAVIC) 5-01 and 5-01 Change 1 provide specific guidance for high speed passenger vessels and include approved vessel operation manuals, training programs and risk assessment tools (matrix).

- Vessel equipment: operators have exceeded minimum requirements for navigation electronics including dual radar, Global Position Satellite and electronic charting with Automatic Identification System overlay.
- Manning/Training: Vessels traveling at high speed are required to have a minimum of two qualified watch-standers during normal operations. Vessel operators have developed approved training programs for high speed navigation in compliance with NAVIC 5-01 and 5-01 Change 1.

Adopted February 2009. See Harbor Safety Plan Chapter XI: Small Passenger Vessels - Ferries for discussion.