Large Vessels and Tugs with Tows ≥ 1600 GT: Speed Restrictions on San Francisco Bay

Large Vessels are power driven vessels of 1600 gross tons or more, and tugs with tows of 1600 gross tons or more. Specific areas where a **15 knot speed limit** applies within the San Francisco Bay region are prescribed in 33 CFR 165.1181:

- Golden Gate Traffic Lanes, which include the westbound and eastbound lanes west of the Golden Gate Precautionary Area
- Golden Gate Precautionary Area
- Central Bay Traffic Lanes, which include the Deep Water Traffic Lane, the eastbound lane (south of Alcatraz Island) and the westbound lane (south of Harding Rock
- Central Bay Precautionary Area
- North Ship Channel between North Channel Lighted Buoy "A" and the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge
- Southampton Shoal Channel including the Richmond Long Wharf maneuvering area
- Richmond Harbor Entrance Channel
- Oakland Harbor Bar Channel including the Outer and Inner Harbors Entrance Channels
- San Pablo Strait Channel
- Pinole Shoal Channel
- Benicia-Martinez Railroad Drawbridge

Additionally, power driven vessels of 1,600 or more gross tons shall have their engines ready for immediate maneuver and shall not operate in control modes or with fuels that prevent an immediate response to any engine order ahead.

Note: In instances where a slower speed than the 15 knot RNA limit is required for safe navigation, the COLREGS will prevail.

See Harbor Safety Plan Chapter VII: Vessel Speed and Traffic Patterns for discussion.

Large Vessels and Tugs with Tows ≥ 1600 GT: Guidelines for Navigating in Reduced Visibility

Large Vessels are power driven vessels of 1600 gross tons or more, and tugs with tows of 1600 gross tons or more. Mariners are at all times to comply with the requirements of the 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. Large vessels should not transit through CMAs when visibility is less than 0.5 nautical mile. 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

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

Vessels docked: Large vessels at a dock within the Bay should not commence a movement if visibility is less than 0.5 nautical mile at the dock.

Vessels proceeding to dock: Large vessels proceeding to a dock should anchor if visibility at the dock is known to be less than 0.5 nautical mile, unless, under all circumstances, proceeding to the dock is the safest option.

Note: Vessel pilots 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.

Adopted March 2008. See Harbor Safety Plan Chapter II: General Weather, Currents and Tides for discussion.

Large Vessels and Tugs with Tows ≥ 1600 gross tons: Guidelines for Navigating in Severe Weather

A number of factors must be considered when limiting transits in the Bay or closing the Bar due to severe weather, including sea state, tidal influences, visibility, traffic density, and wind advisories issued by NOAA. The size, class and condition of the vessels being addressed must also be considered. The HSC recommends a tiered approach, applying greater caution as conditions worsen.

Sustained winds exceeding 25 knots in the Bay

- Vessels should closely evaluate whether it is safe to transit in the Bay. Size, class and sail area of the vessel, tidal influences, visibility, and traffic density should all be considered.
- VTS San Francisco will establish regular communications with bridge watches of VTS users in Bay Area anchorages, and more closely monitor swing circles to ensure vessels are not dragging.

Sustained winds exceeding 40 knots in the Bay

- Transits to and from berths are not recommended.

Sustained winds exceeding 40 knots and/or seas exceed 12 ft at the Sea Buoy

- Bar traffic restrictions and closure should be considered. Size and class of the vessel, draft, swell period, tidal influences, visibility, and traffic density should all be considered. Strong ebb tides should be avoided, and a minimum of 10 feet underkeel clearance is recommended.

Procedures for Closing the Bar or Restricting Bar Traffic

- Bar closures are exercised on a situational basis without specifically defined weather or security conditions.
- The most recent San Francisco Bar Pilot over the Bar, inbound or outbound, shall make the recommendation to the dispatcher that the Bar should be considered for closure, or traffic limited to one-way traffic.
- In the event that the station boat is "boarded off", then the station boat captain will make the recommendation to the dispatcher.
- The dispatcher will then notify the Operations Pilot, who will notify the Port Agent.
- The Operations Pilot or Port Agent will then notify the U.S. Coast Guard VTS and Command Duty Officer at the Sector San Francisco Command Center.

- The Captain of the Port will consult with the Operations Pilot or Port Agent prior to closing the bar under Captain of the Port authority. The Coast Guard will then issue a Marine Safety Broadcast communicating the closure or traffic restriction.
- The procedure for lifting traffic restrictions or re-opening the Bar will be the same as that for restricting traffic or closing the Bar.
- Vessels under Federal Pilotage or Public Vessel may petition the Captain of the Port to transit the San Francisco Bar.

Adopted January 2009. See Harbor Safety Plan Chapter II: General Weather, Currents and Tides for discussion.