

ANNEX F

Vessel Sortie Guidelines

This Vessel Sortie Guideline is to be used by the Prevention Department/Operations Section in making recommendations to the COTP on whether certain vessels may remain in port during a severe weather event.

The decision-making responsibility involving the Coast Guard's heavy weather vessel sortie process is vested with the vessel operators, the Coast Guard, and where appropriate local port authorities. However, the Coast Guard Captain of the Port (COTP) maintains the final decision making authority in accordance with applicable federal statutes and regulations. The overriding goal of the COTP is to protect the safety of life. The COTP should also seek to protect the port's environment and the viability of the Marine Transportation System, including the infrastructure, harbors, and channels. Keep in mind that the COTP shall respect a master's decision and not order a vessel to sea if doing so would unduly hazard the vessel.

- Safety of life is the primary concern when making all decisions.
- Be sensitive to the limiting factors and abilities of tug/barge units and other vessels in severe weather when making decisions to allow vessels to remain in port or make port entry during the approach of heavy weather. Focus on limitations should include but are not limited to watertight integrity and down flooding considerations involving tugs and barges.
- Because of the unpredictable track of hurricanes, industry representatives should be aware that port actions will be initiated and carried out to err on the side of safety. It is possible that storm preparedness actions and port restrictions will occur and the storm may never impact that particular port.
- Vessel operators and companies should be aware of and use applicable appeal procedures when challenging orders issued by the COTP. Operators and companies are encouraged to use oral appeal procedures already in place to expedite the process.
- Vessel operators are responsible for determining and making proper mooring arrangements during the approach of heavy weather. These arrangements will be included in the Remain in Port Request (Annex I) and forwarded to the Coast Guard when requesting to remain in port or requesting to enter port during the approach of heavy weather.
- All heavy weather mooring arrangements are subject to the approval of the COTP. Should a vessel be unable to make satisfactory arrangements, the COTP may require the vessel to depart port.
- Port Authorities and private sector facility owner/operators are important stakeholders during heavy weather contingencies. Vessel operators or company officials must involve these entities in their pre-planning and decision making when desiring to remain in port or make port entry during the approach of heavy weather. The COTP will seek confirmation from terminal/facility owners that vessel Remain in Port Requests can be adequately supported by said terminal/facility.

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