



Marine Notice 11/2011

Navigation safety in the vicinity of barges

There have been a number of accidents and incidents, some fatal, involving collisions with anchored barges or barges being towed.

The purpose of this Marine Notice is therefore to remind seafarers, and all others involved with the operation of barges, or operations in the vicinity of barges, of aspects of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (1972) – the “COLREGS” - which relate to safe operations.

The COLREGS have been carefully examined in the context of incidents involving barges and have been found to be adequate if properly adhered to. The following extracts include elements of the COLREGS that AMSA believes are particularly relevant to navigation safety in the vicinity of barges.

Masters, skippers or coxswains, and all deck watchkeepers need to thoroughly know and understand the full COLREGS and their application in all situations.

COLREGS

Rule 1 commences by stating that the Rules apply to all vessels:

This includes tugs, barges, both recreational and commercial fishing vessels, and all other vessels – by day and by night, and includes vessels underway or at anchor.

Rule 1(b) then states that appropriate authorities for roadsteads, harbours, rivers, lakes or inland waterways may make special rules. This includes local state and territory governments and port authorities who may use local legislation under their responsibilities and authority to ensure the safe operation and anchoring of barges. This may include requiring barges to only anchor in designated areas, or to be lit in excess of the COLREG requirements. The local authorities may also broadcast warning advice to other vessels.

Rule 2 - Responsibility reminds that “nothing in the Rules shall exonerate any vessel, or the owner, master or crew thereof, from the consequences of any neglect to comply with the Rules or of the neglect of any precaution which may be required by the ordinary practice of seamen, or by the special circumstances of the case.”

Rule 5 - Lookout states that “Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision”.

Lessons learned from accident reports clearly show that a proper lookout requires, among other things:

- having enough qualified crew on board to maintain a continuous lookout without being distracted by other tasks, or becoming fatigued;
- having a lookout who knows what they are looking for, for example being able to recognise a tug’s lights and know that a tow will be following at the end of the tow-line;
- having a lookout with good eyesight, especially at night;
- having no lights at the lookout position that would interfere with good night vision and the ability to keep a good lookout;
- using spotlights if appropriate; and
- making full use of radar if fitted and operational.

At night, there can be many lit and unlit hazards to navigation. The presence of moored barges and other hazards in ports, harbours and roadsteads can vary from day to day and all mariners should navigate with appropriate caution in their vicinity.

Barge lighting is often less than that for similar sized manned vessels; and these lights can be higher up than smaller vessels are used to. Barges can therefore be difficult to see against a dark background.

Rule 6 – Safe speed states that “Every vessel shall at all times proceed at a safe speed so that she can take proper and effective action to avoid collision and be stopped within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions”.

Rule 6 also lists a number of factors that should be taken into account in determining a safe speed, including being less able to see obstructions at night (due to background lights or back scatter of own lights) and needing to slow down at night.

Part C (Lights and Shapes) include:

- Rule 20 which includes the provision that lights must not interfere with the keeping of a proper lookout;
- Rule 22 specifies the minimum range of visibility of lights;
- Rule 24 which specifies lights for tugs and tows;
- Rule 26 which specifies lights for fishing vessels; and
- Rule 30 which specifies lights for anchored vessels which includes anchored barges; and which specifically permits a vessel at anchor of less than 100 metres in length to use the available working or equivalent lights to illuminate her decks.

The COLREGs are contained in Marine Orders Part 30 Prevention of Collisions (issue 8 of 2009), which states: “*The measures required by the International Regulations in the navigation, management and working of a ship for the prevention of collisions must be observed.*” It is then noted that: “*A master, mate or other person concerned with the navigation, management or working of a ship is guilty of an offence if he or she fails to comply with any measure required in this Part relating to the prevention of collisions and the provision and use of lights and signals. Subsection 258(7) of the Navigation Act 1912 specifies penalties of up to \$10,000 or imprisonment for 2 years, or both,*

for a person, and up to \$20,000 for a corporation. (By virtue of sections 4AB and 4AA of the Crimes Act 1914, these penalties are now \$11,000 and \$22,000 respectively.)”

Marine Orders Part 30 Prevention of Collisions is available at: www.amsa.gov.au/shipping_safety/marine_orders/index.asp

Further enquiries pertaining to this Marine Notice should be addressed to:

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