



# Marine Safety Information Bulletin

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## CROSSING HAZARDOUS BARS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

This Safety Alert addresses concerns related to the dangers of crossing hazardous bars. Recent marine casualties highlight the challenges of attempting to cross the bar in heavy weather and at night. The marine casualty of a commercial fishing vessel on the Coos Bay bar resulted in loss of a vessel, but miraculously all three crewmembers were saved. Unfortunately, in a similar marine casualty on the Yaquina Bay bar, the crew was not as fortunate as the incident resulted in the loss of all three members of the crew and the vessel. The Commander Thirteenth Coast Guard District advises vessel operators to take appropriate risk reduction measures against the dangers of crossing hazardous bar, especially if the bar has been declared restricted.

The Coast Guard previously established regulated navigation areas for specific locations on the Oregon and Washington coasts and created guidance for these locations. When conditions become hazardous, the Captain of the Port (COTP) for the Coast Guard Sector having jurisdiction over a particular area will either restrict or close the bar. See 33 CFR § 165.1325 for additional information.

**Bar closure** – As determined by the COTP, when the environmental conditions exceed the operational limitations of the relevant Coast Guard search and rescue resources, the bar will be closed and no vessels can cross the bar unless specifically authorized by the COTP.

**Restricted bar** – The COTP will restrict a bar for vessels of a specified length as follows:

- Recreational vessels                      Vessels of that length or less cannot cross the bar
- Uninspected passenger vessels        Vessels of that length or less cannot cross the bar

**Night time bar operations** – The Coast Guard typically reports bar conditions from first light to last light, meaning bar reports become outdated as conditions change during the night. Vessel operators should exercise extreme caution when transiting a restricted bar between sunset to sunrise. If there is any doubt as to conditions on the bar, vessel operators should consider staying outside in deep water until updated conditions can be determined. When the bar is restricted to vessels of a specified length, operators of commercial fishing vessels up to and including that length, shall contact the Coast Guard VHF-FM Channel 16 or 22A prior to crossing the bar and report the vessels name, location or position, the number of persons on board, and destination (destination can be met by saying the vessel is heading “outbound”, “off shore”, “inbound”, or by using any other similarly descriptive language). Operators should report any issues or conditions that may constrain a vessel’s maneuvering (i.e. a line in the prop, the vessel is experiencing an active leak, or if the vessel is experiencing any equipment or machinery problem that may affect maneuvering or stability). Operators should also discuss expected bar conditions, and the potential need for an updated bar report or Coast Guard escort prior to undertaking a hazardous bar crossing at night. The decision to update a bar report after sunset, or conduct an escort on a restricted bar, lies with the Coast Guard and will not always be undertaken dependent on the circumstances. Also, all crew must wear or have PFDs readily accessible.

**Rough bar escorts** – At times, the Coast Guard may determine that the safest option is to escort vessels across a hazardous bar. While the variability of each bar and given conditions require flexibility in how the Coast Guard will undertake an escort, typically two Coast Guard Motor Lifeboats will be on-scene. **Guidance from the on-scene Coast Guard units is always advisory in nature, and at no time are vessel operators relieved of their responsibility for the safe operation and navigation of their vessel.**

**Bar reporting and guidance** – The Coast Guard has released guidance on the following regulated navigation areas. You can access these guidance documents at <http://www.fishsafewest.info/Regs.asp> then open the “Bar Crossing Guidance” folder.

- [Chetco River](#)
- [Columbia River](#)
- [Coos Bay](#)
- [Coquille River](#)
- [Depoe Bay](#)
- [Grays Harbor](#)
- [Quillayute River](#)
- [Rogue River](#)
- [Siuslaw River](#)
- [Tillamook Bay](#)
- [Umpqua River](#)
- [Yaquina Bay](#)

You can view the daily bar status at: <https://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/marine/BarObs.php>

**Outreach** – Vessel operators unfamiliar with local bar conditions, bar reporting methods, or Coast Guard escort techniques are strongly encouraged to contact their local Coast Guard Station. Commanding Officers and Officers in Charge of local stations can provide an overview of their bar reporting areas and discuss, in detail, how their unit will conduct rough bar escorts.

This safety alert is provided for informational purposes by the Thirteenth Coast Guard District Prevention Staff.