

AUTOMATIC IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM (AIS)

Action items:

- Properly program, maintain and update information in the vessel's Automatic Identification System unit. All information should be completed properly and updated as necessary for the specific voyage.

The **Automatic Identification System (AIS)** is a system used by ships and Vessel Traffic Services principally for identifying and locating vessels. AIS helps to resolve the difficulty of identifying ships when not in sight (e.g. in fog, at distance, etc.) by providing a means for ships to automatically exchange identification, position, course, speed, and other ship data with all other nearby ships and VTS stations.

The International Maritime Organization's (IMO) International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) requires AIS to be fitted aboard international voyaging ships of 300 or more gross tonnage, and all passenger ships regardless of size.

The U.S. Coast Guard also requires that a type approved AIS be properly installed and operational on certain vessels operating within a vessel traffic service area as listed in Title 33, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Paragraph 161.12(c). This includes (i) self-propelled vessels of 65 feet or more in length, other than fishing vessels and passenger vessels certificated to carry less than 151 passengers-for-hire, in commercial service; (ii) Towing vessels of 26 feet or more in length and more than 600 horsepower, in commercial service; and (iii) Passenger vessels certificated to carry more than 150 passengers-for-hire. See 33 CFR 164.46.

“Properly installed” refers to an installation using the guidelines set forth in IMO SN/Circ.227 (incorporated by reference, see §164.03). Not all AIS units are able to broadcast position, course, and speed without the input of an external positioning device (e.g. dGPS); the use of other external devices (e.g. transmitting heading device, gyro, rate of turn indicator) is highly recommended, however, not required except as stated in §164.46(a)(2).

It has been noticed that many AIS users are not updating their unit to accurately reflect voyage related information, e.g., navigation status, static draft, destination, estimated time of arrival, etc. Some users fail to properly complete certain basic information. These issues require the due diligence of the users to ensure the AIS unit is always providing proper identification information so that the AIS serves the intended purpose.

Note: AIS data can be invaluable, however, as with any source of navigation information, it should not be solely relied upon in making navigational and collision-avoidance decisions. Further, while AIS allows for safety related ship-to-ship text messaging to communicate with others and make passing arrangements, these communications do not meet the requirements of the Vessel Bridge-to-Bridge Radiotelephone Act (33 U.S. Code 1201 et seq) for broadcasts on the designated bridge-to-bridge channel, nor do they relieve a vessel operator from the Navigation Rules requirement to sound whistle signals or display signals.