



Lower Columbia Region Harbor Safety Committee

Aids to Navigation Guidelines



A. Aids to Navigation (ATON) Guidelines

1. Purpose/ Scope

To provide guidelines to be followed by all vessels operating in the Lower Columbia Region.

2. General Information

The waters of the Lower Columbia Region are marked to assist navigation using the U.S. Aids to Navigation System. This system encompasses buoys and beacons conforming to the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities. The U.S. Aids to Navigation (ATON) System is intended for use with nautical charts. The exact meaning of a particular aid to navigation may not be clear to an individual unless the appropriate nautical chart is consulted. Additional important information supplementing that shown on charts is contained in the *Light List*, *Coast Pilot* and *Sailing Directions*.

Information can be found at the websites below:

<i>Light List</i>	http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/pubs/lightlists/lightlists.htm
<i>Coast Pilot</i>	http://www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/
<i>Sailing Directions</i>	http://www.nga.mil/

ATONs in the Lower Columbia Region are regularly reviewed. These reviews, known as the Waterway Analysis and Management System Studies (WAMS), are conducted by the U.S. Coast Guard with input from pilots and other waterway users.

3. Cautions using Aids to Navigation

The aids to navigation depicted on charts comprise a system of fixed and floating aids that have varying degrees of reliability. Mariners should not rely solely on any single ATON, particularly a floating aid. With respect to buoys, the buoy symbol is used to indicate the approximate position of the buoy body and sinker, which secures the buoy to the seabed. These limitations include inherent imprecision in position fixing methods, prevailing atmospheric and river conditions, the slope and the material making up the riverbed, the fact that the buoys are moored to sinkers by varying lengths of chain, and the fact that the buoy body and/or sinker positions are not under continuous surveillance but are normally checked only during periodic maintenance visits. Due to the forces of nature, the position of the buoy body can be expected to shift inside and outside the charting symbol.

Buoys may be carried away, shifted, capsized, sunk, etc. Lighted buoys may be extinguished or sound signals may not function as the result of natural causes, collisions, or other accidents. Mariners should not rely solely upon the position or operation of floating ATON, but also use bearings from fixed objects and aids to navigation on shore. Further, a vessel attempting to pass close aboard always risks collision with a yawing buoy or with the obstruction the buoy may be marking.

4. Actions if Discrepancies to Aids to Navigation are Identified

- If you see an ATON discrepancy, (buoy off station, light extinguished, etc.) contact the Coast Guard. Your timely report could prevent an accident.
- If underway, contact the Coast Guard Sector Columbia River by VHF or cell phone at 503-861-6211 or (866) 284-6958.



- If not underway, or if merely commenting on ATON, contact Commander, Thirteenth Coast Guard District (dpw) either by mail (Henry M. Jackson Federal Building, 915 2nd Ave, Seattle, WA 98174-1067) or by phone at 206-220-7270.

Vessel operators are required to notify the Coast Guard of any damage or destruction of aids to navigation by 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 4.05-20, and there is a penalty for noncompliance. Occasionally, aids to navigation are struck, causing damage and displacement or complete loss, without the knowledge of the Coast Guard. The result is diminished protection for marine traffic due to the failure of vessel operators to furnish notice of these collisions to the nearest local Coast Guard unit as required by law and regulation. All vessel operators who witness another vessel or individual damage or destroy an aid to navigation, or believe an aid is not watching properly or is off station in accordance with the Coast Guard *Light List*, should report the incident to the nearest Coast Guard unit. The CFR excerpt below provides more details on reporting discrepancies.

TITLE 33--NAVIGATION AND NAVIGABLE WATERS
CHAPTER I--COAST GUARD, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
PART 62--UNITED STATES AIDS TO NAVIGATION SYSTEM
Subpart D--Public Participation in the Aids to Navigation System

Section 62.65 Procedure for reporting defects and discrepancies.

- (a) Mariners should notify the nearest Coast Guard facility immediately of any observed aids to navigation defects or discrepancies.
- (b) The Coast Guard cannot monitor the many thousands of aids in the U.S. Aids to Navigation System simultaneously and continuously. As a result, it is not possible to maintain every aid operating properly and on its charted position at all times. Marine safety will be enhanced if persons finding aids missing, sunk, capsized, damaged, off station, or showing characteristics other than those advertised in the Light List, or other publication, promptly inform the Coast Guard. When making the report to the Coast Guard the mariner should consult the Light List to ensure the correct geographical information is used due to the similarity of names and geographical areas.
- (c) Procedures for reporting defects and discrepancies:
 - (1) Radio messages should be prefixed "Coast Guard" and transmitted directly to a Government shore radio station listed in Chapter three of Radio Navigation Aids Publication, 117, for relay to the relevant District Commander.
 - (2) Telephone, e-mail, or facsimile messages may also be used to advise the nearest Coast Guard unit of defects or discrepancies in aids to navigation.
 - (3) Via our Web portal at <http://www.navcen.uscg.gov>.

5. Changes to Aids to Navigation

The Coast Guard frequently evaluates its system of aids to navigation to determine whether the conditions for which the aids were established have changed. Some of the conditions that are considered include environmental changes, i.e., shoaling, type and amount of vessel traffic, and improved equipment technology. When changes occur, the feasibility of improving, relocating, or discontinuing aids is considered. Comments on



proposed changes should be addressed to: Commander (dpw), Thirteenth Coast Guard District, 915 Second Avenue, Seattle, WA 98174-1067.

All recommendations of changes to Aids to Navigation are requested to be forwarded to the LCRHSC as well as to Coast Guard Sector Columbia River/ MSU Portland.

The CFR excerpt below provides more details on the specific information that should be provided.

TITLE 33--NAVIGATION AND NAVIGABLE WATERS
CHAPTER I--COAST GUARD, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
PART 62--UNITED STATES AIDS TO NAVIGATION SYSTEM
Subpart D--Public Participation in the Aids to Navigation System

Section 62.63 Recommendations.

- (a) The public may recommend changes to existing aids to navigation, request new aids or the discontinuation of existing aids, and report aids no longer necessary for maritime safety. These recommendations should be sent to the appropriate District Commander.
- (b) Recommendations, requests and reports should be documented with as much information as possible to justify the proposed action. Desirable information includes:
 - (1) Nature of the vessels which transit the area(s) in the question, including type, displacement, draft, and number of passengers and crew.
 - (2) Where practicable, the kinds of navigating devices used aboard such vessels (e.g., magnetic or gyro compasses, radio direction finders, radar, loran, and searchlights).
 - (3) A chartlet or sketch describing the actual or proposed location of the aid(s), and description of the action requested or recommended.

6. Interference with Aids to Navigation

In accordance with 33CFR 70.01: "No person shall obstruct or interfere with any aid to navigation established and maintained by the Coast Guard, or any private aid to navigation established and maintained in accordance with Title 33, Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 64, 66, or 67. Any person violating the provisions of this section shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and be subject to a fine not exceeding the sum of \$500 for each offense, and each day during such violation shall be considered a new offense."

7. Private Aids to Navigation

Private aids to navigation (PATON) include all marine aids to navigation operated in the navigable waters of the United States other than those operated by the Federal Government or those operated in State waters for private use. The U.S. Coast Guard Commandant controls PATON and permission is required for new PATON or changes to existing PATON. To get permission to establish and maintain, discontinue, change, or transfer ownership of a private aid to navigation, submit a "Private Aids to Navigation Application" (CG-2554) to Coast Guard District 13. To request this form, write



Commander, Thirteenth Coast Guard District, 915 Second Avenue, Room 3510, Seattle, WA 98174-1067; call (206) 220-7270; or go to <http://www.uscg.mil/d13/oan/paton.htm>.