

Lower Columbia Region Harbor Safety Committee  
**Harbor Safety Plan | Chapter 2**

# **AIDS TO NAVIGATION GUIDELINES**

***CHANGE LOG:***

<b>Changes Made</b>	<b>Sub-Committee</b>	<b>Date Approved</b>
Updated Logo. No content changes.	N/A	4/4/23
Updated formatting. Updated USCG numbers.	N/A	5/15/25
Updated contact information	N/A	9/29/25
Updated Thirteenth District to Northwest District	N/A	3/11/26

## **A. Purpose/Scope**

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

## **B. 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 (IALA). Specifically, the Columbia River (along with most other U.S. waterways) follow IALA-B, which places red aids on your starboard side when transiting inbound from a channel. 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 or U.S. Chart No. 1 is consulted. Additional important information supplementing what is shown on the charts is contained in the *Light List*, *Coast Pilot*, *U.S. Chart No. 1*, and *Sailing Directions*. Information can be found at the websites below:

*Light List Volume VI for Pacific Coast and Pacific Island*

<https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=lightLists>

*US Coast Pilot Volume 10 for Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, and Pacific Islands*

<https://nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/publications/coast-pilot/index.html>

U.S. Chart No. 1

<https://nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/publications/us-chart-1.html>

*Sailing Directions*

<https://msi.nga.mil/Publications/SDPGuides>

The effectiveness of Aids to Navigation is regularly reviewed. These reviews, known as Waterway Analysis and Management System Studies (WAMS), are conducted by the U.S. Coast Guard with input from pilots and other waterway users.

## **C. Caution Using Aids to Navigation**

The ATON depicted on nautical charts comprise a system of fixed and floating aids that have varying degrees of reliability. Mariners should not rely solely on any single ATON; and specifically, shall not solely rely on a single floating ATON. With respect to buoys, the charted buoy symbol is used to indicate the approximate position of the buoy sinker, which anchors the buoy to the sea floor, not the exact location of the buoy hull.

Due to environmental forces, the position of the buoy hull can be located outside of the chart symbol. There are many factors that contribute to a buoy's inherent imprecision including river conditions (tide and current), seas and swells, bottom type, and slope changes at the buoys assigned position. Buoys are anchored to the sea floor using sinkers and varying lengths of chain. Buoys are serviced on maintenance cycles; meaning that some buoys are not serviced, including a position verification, for multiple years unless it is discrepant. Buoys may be carried away, shifted, capsized, or 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 shall use all means available to accurately fix the ship's position. Give buoys an appropriate berth when passing as a vessel attempting to pass close aboard risks collision with a yawing buoy or with the obstruction the buoy may be marking.

#### **D. Reporting Aids to Navigation Discrepancies**

Mariners should notify the Coast Guard Sector Columbia River Command Center immediately of any observed ATON defects or discrepancies via VHF-FM channel 16, or by phone at (833) 769-8724. Your timely report could prevent a marine casualty.

The Coast Guard cannot monitor the thousands of aids in the U.S. Aids to Navigation System continuously. Furthermore, it is impossible to be able to constantly verify the correct position and operation of every aid. In the event that you observe an aid that is missing, sunk, capsized, damaged, off station, or showing characteristics other than those advertised in the Light List or on the chart, 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. Additionally, before making the call, the mariner should check the local notice to mariners for any anomalies with aid positioning and/or characteristics.

#### **E. 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 in the area, and improvements in technology. When changes occur, the feasibility of improving, relocating, or discontinuing aids is considered.

Comments on proposed changes should be addressed to:  
Commanding Officer (wwm)  
Marine Safety Unit Portland  
6767 N Basin Ave  
Portland OR 97217  
or by phone at 833-769-8724

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 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.

## **F. 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."

## **G. 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, please visit the Coast Guard Northwest District's PATON website to download the current CG-2554 and CG-554A forms:

<https://www.pacificarea.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Northwest-District/District-Staff/dp/dpw/paton/>

You can also request the forms from the following address:

Commander (dpw)  
U.S. Coast Guard Northwest District  
915 2nd Avenue, Room 3510  
Seattle, WA 98174-1067  
Attn: PATON Manager  
SMB-CGD-NW-PATON@uscg.mil