

ROSARIO TOWING VESSEL OPERATIONS

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. This Standard of Care alerts towing vessel owners and operators to the dangers associated with transiting Rosario Strait, and establishes good marine practice to mitigate associated safety risks to minimize the possibility of a vessel casualty.
2. Rosario Strait is a narrow waterway connecting the Strait of Georgia and the Inland Passage of British Columbia with the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Rosario Strait passes through the eastern San Juan Island archipelago, is part of the larger Eastern San Juan Island VTS Special Area, and is defined in 33 CFR 161.55(b). An International Maritime Organization (IMO) designated one lane Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) with no separation zone traverses Rosario Strait. Rosario Strait experiences substantial tidal currents and has numerous hazards to navigation.
3. According to NOAA Pacific Coast Tidal Current Tables, tidal currents ebb to the south in Rosario Strait. Tidal currents in Guemes Channel strongly ebb to the west at a higher speed ratio compared to Rosario Strait with the current changing to ebb 90 minutes prior to the currents in Rosario Strait. Guemes Channel is oriented east/west and connects Rosario Strait with the Anacortes-March Point area. Based on geography, Rosario Strait can be affected by ebbing tidal currents from Guemes Channel. As chart editions are updated, NOAA will incorporate the addition of a cautionary note to applicable nautical charts of Rosario Strait to highlight the danger to mariners.
4. USCG VTS Puget Sound has observed a trend for tugs and tows transiting north or southbound in Rosario Strait to be set to the west, particularly in the southern portions of Rosario Strait where several navigational hazards exist just to the west outside the traffic lane. VTS Puget Sound will continue to employ electronic visual alarm zones within Rosario Strait to alert Vessel Traffic Management Specialists when a vessel may be departing the traffic lane and standing into potential danger so that a timely and relevant marine traffic advisory can be provided to help avert a marine casualty.
5. Nothing in this Standard of Care relinquishes the vessel owner or operator from any of the requirements regarding vessel safety and the protection of the environment specified in the applicable sections of 46 CFR “Shipping” and 33 CFR “Navigation,” or the International Regulations for Prevention of Collisions at Sea, 1972 (72 COLREGS).

ACTION: It is crucial that towing vessel owners and operators remain cognizant of the challenges associated with transiting Rosario Strait, convey this information in company operating manuals, take extra precautions to ensure vigilant watch standing practices, and consider augmenting bridge watch manning while transiting this environmentally sensitive waterway as a measure to mitigate risk.

B. SPECIFIC STANDARD OF CARE

1. This Standard of Care is applicable to all towing vessel transits (not light tugs without a tow) through Rosario Strait regardless of the time of day or tidal state, weather conditions, or visibility.
 - a. Towing vessels are encouraged to transit the middle of the single traffic lane, except when meeting another vessel or to comply with the VTS Special Area regulations not to impede the passage of a vessel of 40,000 dead weight tons or more.
 - b. Towing vessels are to call USCG VTS Puget Sound on channel 05A at a Calling In Point when southbound in Rosario Strait. This Calling In Point will be at 48° 35' 00"N, when abeam Tide Point. This Calling In Point will place emphasis on the importance of watchstander vigilance and provide an opportunity for USCG VTS to share appropriate vessel traffic and/or hydrological information.
2. Additional VTS Special Area regulations for towing vessels in Rosario Strait are restated below:
 - a. If towing astern, do so with as short a hawser as safety and good seamanship permits.
 - b. Towing vessels shall not enter or get underway in the VTS Special Area if a hazardous vessel operating condition exists as defined in 33 CFR 161.2. Deviations may be granted only by the USCG Captain of the Port.
 - c. Before meeting, crossing, or overtaking any other Vessel Movement Reporting System User in the VTS Special Area, towing vessels shall communicate on the designated vessel bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone frequency their intended navigation movements and any other information necessary in order to make safe passing arrangements.