

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security


United States
Coast Guard



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From: 
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To: Distribution

Subj: GUIDANCE ON HURRICANE MARIA RELIEF VESSELS RESPONSE POSTURE
AND EFFORTS TO SUPPORT THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO AND
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

Ref: (a) 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 90.05-10
(b) D7(dp) Policy Ltr 01-2017, TEMPORARY EMERGENCY BERTHING
VESSELS, dated Oct 3, 2017

1. **PURPOSE.** The 2017 hurricane season has been a historic year for weather phenomena and vessels across the nation have offered to participate in relief efforts to the affected regions of District Seven (D7) including Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This Policy Letter provides guidelines to be used by District Commanders, Sector Commanders, and Officers in Charge of Marine Inspection (OCMI) when considering requests for vessels to participate in this hurricane relief effort. This guidance also provides the criteria that U.S. Coast Guard certificated vessels are expected to meet to participate in relief efforts in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
2. **DISCUSSION.** Ref (a) requires U.S. cargo and miscellaneous vessels inspected under Subchapter I transiting to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) or other U.S. territories to meet the requirements for vessels on international voyages. This includes voyages between Puerto Rico and the USVI. Vessels requiring exemptions or equivalency determinations to support hurricane relief efforts will require D7 approval to operate within D7. Vessel owners and operators should submit these requests to D07-SMB-HurricaneReliefVessels@uscg.mil. An email with an attached letter is acceptable. D7 will coordinate any required inspection activities with the appropriate OCMI's in advance of the transit.
3. **ACTION.**

For the purposes of this event, 2017 Hurricane Maria Response within the Seventh District and for relief efforts to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the USVI, the following guidelines have been established:

- a. **SOLAS Exemptions** - Per ref (a), those vessels that do not have SOLAS certificates must request and obtain a SOLAS exemption from CG-CVC in order to transit to Puerto

Rico and the USVI. A SOLAS exemption authorizes a vessel to make a single voyage to Puerto Rico and the USVI without the appropriate international certificates. It does not exempt nor authorize the vessel to conduct any other types of operations outside the scope of their COI. Exemption requests are to be submitted in writing to D07-SMB-HurricaneReliefVessels@uscg.mil. An email with an attached letter is acceptable.

- b. **Sub-Chapter “I” vessels** with valid SOLAS certificates do not require additional Coast Guard approval to participate in relief efforts.
- c. **Dual Certificated vessels (“I” and “L”)** with valid SOLAS certificates do not require a Coast Guard exemption to participate in relief efforts. Those without SOLAS certificates may request a SOLAS exemption in accordance with the procedures in paragraph 3.a of this policy.
- d. **Sub-Chapter “L” vessels and existing OSVs inspected under subchapter “I”.** 46 U.S.C. 2101 (19) allows Offshore Supply Vessels (OSV) to, “carry goods, supplies, individuals in addition to the crew, or equipment in support of exploration, exploitation, or production of offshore mineral or energy resources.” OSVs that are not dual certificated (“I” and “L”) are not normally authorized to participate in relief efforts as that is not within the scope of their normally approved operations. However, these requests can be considered. These requests should be submitted utilizing the same process outlined in paragraph 2 of this policy.
- e. **Hazardous Material Cargo:** Vessels may carry hazardous cargoes only as permitted by the vessel’s COI. Waivers will not be granted to carry hazardous cargoes outside what is authorized by the vessel’s COI.
- f. **Manning:** Vessels are to be manned with appropriately licensed personnel as required by their COI. Personnel with near coastal licenses are not authorized for voyages from the continental U.S. to Puerto Rico or USVI. Reduced manning will not be considered for voyages to, from and between Puerto Rico and the USVI.
- g. **Berthing Vessels:** Vessels operating outside the scope of their COI must request an inspection by the OCMI where the vessel is located that the vessel is adequate for berthing and obtain either an Excursion Permit or an amended COI authorizing carriage of additional personnel. For vessels already in Puerto Rico or the USVI, contact OCMI San Juan. For vessels departing from outside Sector San Juan’s AOR, contact the cognizant OCMI for the vessel’s departure port. D7 Policy 01-2017 (ref (b)) for Temporary Emergency Berthing Vessels is to be followed. Note: reduced manning as allowed in D7 Policy 01-2017 will only be considered once the vessel arrives in Puerto Rico or the USVI, as deemed appropriate by OCMI San Juan.
- h. Advanced Notice of Arrival (ANOVA) notifications shall be made prior to arrival in accordance with 33 CFR 160 Subpart C.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS. Environmental considerations were examined in the development of this Instruction and have been determined to be not applicable.
5. DISCLAIMER. This policy letter guidance is neither a substitute for applicable legal requirements, nor a rule. It is not intended nor does it impose legally-binding requirements on any party. It represents the Coast Guard's current thinking on this topic and may assist industry, mariners, the general public, and the Coast Guard, as well as other Federal and state regulators, in applying statutory and regulatory requirements. An alternative approach may be used for complying with these requirements if the approach satisfies the requirements of the applicable statutes and regulations. If you want to discuss an alternative approach (you are not required to do so), you may contact the Coast Guard Office of Commercial Vessel Compliance (CG-CVC) who is responsible for implementing this guidance.
6. QUESTIONS. Questions concerning this policy letter and guidance should be directed to the Office of Commercial Vessel Compliance, COMDT (CG-CVC), Domestic Compliance Division at CG-CVC-1@uscg.mil. This policy letter and other domestic vessel policy documents are posted on the CG-CVC website at http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cgcvc/cvc/policy/policy_letters.asp.

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