

Maritime New Zealand Guidelines

SAFETY BULLETIN ISSUE 20 – AUGUST 2009

DANGEROUS USE OF MOBILE PHONES WHILE A VESSEL IS UNDERWAY

This safety bulletin is for:

- masters and skippers of commercial and pleasure vessels
- ship operators and management
- safe ship management companies.

Purpose of this bulletin

To alert the New Zealand maritime community to the safety risk of masters and skippers using mobile phones while a vessel is underway.

Use of mobile phones as a safety hazard

Three people have been killed in recent collisions as a result of skippers being distracted by their use of mobile phones. A number of serious injuries have also occurred.

It is important to note that mobile phones may serve a useful function as a back up means of emergency communication. However, it is clear that their use by skippers and masters to receive or make calls or text messages needs to be managed appropriately to the circumstances of each operation. This risk is heightened while a vessel is underway, with the likelihood and consequences of an accident being greater when vessels are operated:

- at speed
- in poor sea conditions
- in conditions of restricted visibility
- close to other vessels
- close to navigation hazards.

All New Zealand masters and skippers are reminded of their legal responsibility under Maritime Rule Part 22.5 to ensure their vessel maintains a proper lookout by sight and hearing as well as by all available means in the prevailing circumstances and conditions, so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and the risk of collision.

Because the risk profile of every operation is different, ship operators and management are also asked to ensure that any safety risk associated with mobile phone use is appropriately identified and managed. Risk management strategies will differ according to the circumstances, but may include prohibiting mobile phone use while a vessel is either underway or at critical stages of her passage.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- All New Zealand masters and skippers note their responsibility to ensure their vessel maintains a proper lookout at all times.

- Ship operators and management have procedures in place to identify and manage any safety risk that is associated with masters, skippers and other key personnel using mobile phones while a vessel is underway.

Further information

For further information please contact our Wellington office:

Phone: 0508 22 55 22 or (04) 473 0111

Fax: (04) 494 8901

Email: enquiries@maritimenz.govt.nz