

## Mobile Phone (Cell Phone) Use and Marine Operations

### OVERVIEW

When used appropriately, mobile telephones (mobile phones, also called cellular or “cell” phones) can be a useful tool for those in the marine industry. However, when used inappropriately they can be a dangerous distraction that leads to marine accidents and oil spills.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

If your company/organization does not explicitly address mobile phone use (for voice, text messaging, or games) in your operations manual or standard operating procedures, modify the manual/procedures to establish rules for mobile phone use by on-duty personnel. The rules should, at a minimum:

- Restrict mobile phone use by on-duty personnel to operations-related calls.
- Set time limits for those calls – those limits should allow only brief, important conversations.
- Identify locations and circumstances when on-duty mobile phone calls are permitted, or are not permitted. Choose the best approach for your operation.
- Outline procedures for on-duty personnel to get relief should they receive a personal mobile phone call of an emergency nature.

### BACKGROUND

Two oil spills occurred in Washington State in 2009 that involved mobile phone use:

- The sole navigation watch stander and lookout of a tugboat pulling a laden tank barge at night near ferry lanes in Puget Sound was also in charge of monitoring the tug’s deck for spills during an internal transfer of diesel fuel. About 200 gallons of diesel spilled to Washington waters before the watch stander noticed the spill and stopped the transfer. Before noticing the spilling oil, the watch stander had back-to-back mobile phone conversations lasting about 19 minutes.



### WHY THIS MATTERS

The Washington State legislature has established a “zero spills” goal. Mobile phone use is frequent and growing and can be a significant distraction when used inappropriately. Distracted personnel can cause spills so marine employers need to clearly and directly address the issue of mobile phone use in their operations manual or standard operating procedures.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### Special accommodations:

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- The engineer in charge of fueling his tugboat was topping-off one of its tanks with diesel. The engineer on the delivering vessel saw him talking on his mobile phone and called him to task because it was against

company policy. The engineer hung up the phone and went below to close the valve to the tank and open the valve to another. When he returned to the deck, diesel was spilling from an opening on deck for the tank he was topping-off. About five gallons spilled to Washington waters.

#### Elsewhere:

- A chemical tank ship ran aground in England after dropping off a pilot, while the ship's Master engaged in a series of mobile phone conversations.
- A container ship ran aground near Denmark while the navigation officer was sending and receiving text messages (texting) on his mobile phone for over 40 minutes.
- A fishing vessel ran aground north of Scotland when the master failed to change course. One of the distractions he experienced just prior

to the grounding was a 10-minute mobile phone call with a friend.

- The collision between two piloted vessels in England resulted in the following finding: "Pilots' mobile telephones were used as the means of communication between the two vessels before and after the accident, resulting in the masters being excluded from the information exchange regarding their own ships."
- Maritime New Zealand, citing three fatalities involving vessel skippers using mobile phones, issued a safety bulletin urging ship operators to manage the risk appropriately.

#### In other transportation modes:

- The National Transportation Safety Board cited mobile phone use as a significant issue in a collision between a passenger and freight train. The collision resulted in 25 fatalities. The passenger train engineer sent a text message just before he failed to stop at a signal to allow the freight train to pass.
- The National Safety Council has called for a ban on mobile phone use while driving an automobile, citing study data that implicates mobile phone use in six percent of crashes.

## RESEARCH

- A study found that automobile driver performance while talking on a mobile phone was comparable to driving while under the influence of alcohol at the legal limit.
- According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), driving an automobile while using a mobile phone can pose a serious mental distraction and degrade driver performance. NHTSA estimates that driver distraction from all sources contributes to 25 percent of all police-reported traffic crashes.
- Both hands-free and hand-held mobile phones result in mental distraction that is significant enough to degrade the performance of a driver, causing them to miss key visual and audio cues needed to avoid a crash.

## OTHER PORTABLE ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Similar consideration should be given to incorporating rules for the use of other portable electronic devices into your operations manual or standard operating procedures.

## RESOURCES

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>

National Safety Council:

<http://www.nsc.org/>

Marine Accident Investigation Branch:

<http://www.maib.gov.uk/home/index.cfm>

Maritime New Zealand:

<http://www.maritimenz.govt.nz/>

## REFERENCES

U.K. Marine Accident Investigation Branch, Report No. 2/2005, February 2005

U.K. Marine Accident Investigation Branch, Report No. 17/2006, July 2006

U.K. Marine Accident Investigation Branch, Report No. 10/2002, March 2002

U.K. Marine Accident Investigation Branch, Report No. 6/2007, April 2007

Maritime New Zealand, "Dangerous use of mobile phones while a vessel is underway," *Safety Bulletin*, Issue 20, August 2009

NTSB Presentation "Collision of Metrolink Passenger Train 111 and Union Pacific Freight Train LOF65-12, Chatsworth, California, September 12, 2008," Public Hearing DCA-08-MR-009, March 3-4, 2009

National Safety Council Press Release, "National Safety Council Calls for Nationwide Ban on Cell Phone Use While Driving," January 12, 2009

Strayer, David L., Frank A. Drews and Dennis J. Crouch, "A Comparison of the Cell Phone Driver and the Drunk Driver," *Human Factors*, Vol. 48, No. 2, Summer 2006, pp. 381-391.

NHTSA Policy and FAQs on Cellular Phone Use While Driving

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