

USCG Cruise Ship NCOE Field Notice



U.S. Coast Guard
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Cruise Ships Built without a Magnetic Compass

This field notice provides guidance to Captains of the Port (COTPs) for evaluating requests from Foreign Passenger Vessels to operate in U.S. waters without a magnetic compass as required by 33 CFR § 164.35(b) and Regulation V/19.2.1.1 of the 74 SOLAS Convention.

Flag Administrations have been granting SOLAS Chapter V Equivalents for new cruise ships built with modern navigation suites that do not include a magnetic compass. Although SOLAS contains means for granting Equivalents for the ship, the CFR does not allow for such an equivalent. However, a COTP may authorize deviations from navigation safety regulations in accordance with 33 CFR § 164.55. A deviation authorization may be granted for continuing operation or period of time as deemed reasonable at the time of issuance. A cruise ship operator must request a deviation from the COTP for each zone in which the ship operates.

If a COTP receives such a request, the determination must be made as to whether the ship operating without a magnetic compass impairs the safe navigation of the vessel under anticipated conditions. To facilitate the risk-based decision making process, the COTP may request the Flag State SOLAS equivalent or exemption, and any risk assessment documentation used by the Flag State and/or Recognized Organization to evaluate the navigation suite as equivalent to SOLAS Chapter V requirements.

COTPs are encouraged to thoroughly assess the local navigation hazards, port congestion, traffic patterns, hazards associated with inclement weather or nighttime voyages, and consult with pilot associations to determine any additional requirements that may be required upon authorization of any deviation request. If the COTP authorizes a deviation for continuing operation, then an authorization letter should be issued to the ship. The unit may consult with CSNCOE in preparing the authorization letter. A deviation request must be submitted for each ship, and to each COTP for each COTP zone of the ship's intended operation. Each port has its own navigation safety considerations, so a decision in one COTP zone should not be considered a precedent for deviation requests in other COTP zones.

Questions regarding this field notice should be forwarded to the National Technical Advisor for the Cruise Ship National Center of Expertise at (954) 767-2140 or by email at CSNCOE@uscg.mil.

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