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Boating Tip #8: Boating Reference Publications

In addition to charts, it is helpful to have several publications, including Coast Pilots, light lists, tide tables, current tables, Navigation Rules, and the Local Notice to Mariners onboard for reference and to assist with navigation.

Coast Pilot

The Coast Pilot is an official government publication similar to a cruising guide and includes information about areas in which you are operating. The Coast Pilot is published by NOAA by region. For example, United States Coast Pilot 7 is for the Pacific Coast: California, Oregon, Washington and Hawaii. It contains descriptive information about routes, applicable charts, approaches, aids to navigation, distances, weather information, anchorages, restricted areas, and hazards. It also includes navigation regulations, and useful general information on topics like pollution prevention, submarine identification signals, destructive waves, distress procedures, towing preparation, helicopter rescue... Coast Pilots can be downloaded as pdf files from www.nauticalcharts.gov/view.

Light List

Light lists describe lights and buoys in the order you are likely to encounter them. Light Lists give the geographic range of lights, or how far you can see a light from a particular height. Chart acronyms, chart symbols, a glossary of terms, and index of light names are included. The light list should be corrected from the Local Notice to Mariners.

Local Notice to Mariners

The Local Notice to Mariners is published monthly and weekly by each Coast Guard District. It is no longer mailed weekly and free of charge to boaters. It is now available on the web at www.navcen.uscg.gov/lnm/d11. The Local Notice to Mariners lists special notices of interest to boaters, provides information about the status of GPS and LORAN, lists discrepancies or temporary changes (missing, inoperative, reduced intensity, damage) to aids to navigation, chart corrections, proposed changes in aids to navigation, and hazards to navigation.

The “Notice to Mariners” is also published weekly, by the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA), and provides information primarily for large vessels.

Tide Tables

Tide tables provide times and height differences for high and low water. Tide tables also provide sunrise / sunset and moon rise / moon set times.

To find the depth at a location, add the height from the tide tables to the charted depth. Use information for the reference station or correct for the subordinate station nearest where you are sailing. Remember to add an hour for Daylight Savings Time.

The official tide tables are published by International Marine for NOS of NOAA. Privately published almanacs, web sites and commercial tide tables are also available.

Current Tables

Current tables provide predictions on the horizontal movement of water, slack time or minimum current flow, and times of maximum flood for both ebbs and both floods, speed of a current in knots for flood and ebb, and the approximate true direction of currents. Current cannot be determined from tide tables. Information on currents is provided for primary reference stations and thousands of subordinate stations.

Usually there are 4 slack currents and 4 maximum currents each day, but currents can be altered by wind, weather, and river discharge, so actual speeds and times may vary from what is published.

Official current tables are published by International Marine for NOS of NOAA, and by the Canadian Hydrographic Service. Privately published almanacs, web sites and commercial current tables are also available.

Navigation Rules

Navigational Rules are the “rules of the road” under which boaters must operate. They are published by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for the United States Coast Guard. The text includes both Inland Rules and International Rules. International and Inland Navigational Rules and their Annexes are similar in content and format, but there are some important differences.

The Inland Rules replace the old Inland Rules, Western Rivers Rules, Great Lakes Rules and parts of the Motorboat Act of 1940. They were adopted by Congress as the Inland Navigational Rules Act of 1980, and became effective December 24, 1981

(except on the Great Lakes where they went in to effect on March 1, 1983).

The International Rules, commonly referred to as the 72 COLREGS, were formalized at the Convention on the International Regulations for Prevention of Collisions at Sea. They were adopted by Congress as the International Navigational Rules Act of 1977, and became effective on July 15, 1977. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopted 55 amendments (effective in 1983), and 8 more amendments (effective in 1989). The International Rules are applicable on waters outside demarcation lines.