

Safety Alert



SA 006

The Use of Mobile Phones and Handheld Data Devices

A [Safety Advisory](#) has been published by the United States Coast Guard (USCG) regarding the use of mobile phones, smart phones and handheld text and email messaging devices. It was issued as a result of National Transportation Safety Board investigations into two collisions involving USCG small craft. The investigators found that mobile phones used to place calls or send text messages while underway were factors in both incidents.

The USCG Safety Advisory reiterates much of the advice issued by the United Kingdom Maritime and Coastguard Agency in Marine Guidance Note (MGN) 299 '[Interference with Safe Navigation through Inappropriate use of Mobile Phones](#)' which highlights the risk of mobile phones distracting those tasked with the safe navigation of the vessel. Although published over 5 years ago, the advice is particularly relevant today now that it is common for seafarers to bring mobile phones with them when they join a ship.

Being able to keep in contact with family and friends while off duty is a welcome development, as is the ability to call the office



easily when within range of a signal. However, there have been a number of navigational incidents, mostly groundings, which have occurred due to bridge team members becoming distracted while using mobile phones in a similar manner to accidents caused by motorists using mobile phones while driving.

Members who may not have done so already are encouraged to modify their Safety Management Systems to include procedures prohibiting the use of mobile phones and hand held messaging devices in circumstances where the full

attention of bridge watchkeeping personnel is required. For example:

- In pilotage waters or when entering or departing port.
- When navigating in the vicinity of ports or anchorages.
- In restricted visibility.
- In areas of high traffic density.
- In areas of restricted sea room.
- When only one navigating officer is on watch.

If further information is required, please contact the Loss Prevention department.