



USCGD17 SAFETY ALERT: PV002-2008

July 15, 2008

Juneau, AK

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Passenger Vessel Safety Alert program was developed to provide timely safety related marine casualty information to mariners with the goal of preventing similar incidents. This program is part of an ongoing effort to apply Prevention Through People (PTP) principles to improve safety.

Mind the Helm: Situational Awareness

The recent grounding of a passenger vessel at the head of Tarr Inlet in Glacier Bay National Park Alaska highlights the critical importance of maintaining situational awareness not only for actions occurring on or around your vessel, but also awareness of the importance and limits of your on board navigation tools.

Mariners are cautioned to use all available onboard navigation tools, including depth sounders, forward looking radar, lookouts or other means. Do not rely on a single navigation tool. Use multiple data sources in combination, such as a chart and depth sounder.

Know the limits of your charts, whether paper or electronic. The area of the grounding in Glacier Bay was last surveyed in 1972. Ensure your charts are current or currently updated, and understand the potential impact of the survey date on the accuracy of the information, especially in dynamic areas around receding glaciers and glacier fed rivers.

Navigation charts often note a caution not to approach closer than ½ of a mile to the face of a glacier. This should be considered the minimum. Be cautious of using a pre-determined distance. In some cases, half a mile may not be sufficient. The glacier may have receded substantially, potentially placing you in water that has not been surveyed and shallower than expected. What was a safe distance from the face of a glacier last season may no longer be adequate for safe navigation this season.

Be familiar with the area. Shoaling activity at the head of bays with receding glaciers and glacier fed rivers is unpredictable. If unfamiliar with the area, check with local authorities, pilots or other vessels on current conditions and recommendations for safe navigation recommendations.

Anticipate the effect and speed of a falling tide. High tides often conceal expansive flats in front of a river or glacier mouth. Do not get trapped in a near shore area by a tide falling faster than expected.

Recommendation: Mariners are urged to:

Review and evaluate their procedures for situational awareness and bridge resource management in all areas, especially in areas where survey data for nautical charts may not be up to date.

Frequently check depth sounder when approaching shallow water and in areas where glaciers have recently receded.

Evaluate the need to designate “no sail” zones in dynamic areas with rapidly receding glaciers or glacier fed river deltas.

