

U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security

United States  
Coast Guard



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United States Coast Guard  
Sector Puget Sound

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### MARINE SAFETY INFORMATION BULLETIN

*These bulletins are purely informational for the maritime community within this Captain of the Port zone to advise of emerging information and situations that may impact the Marine Transportation System. Increased vigilance in our maritime world hinges significantly upon proactive engagement and information sharing with the private sector, which has the primary responsibility for safety and security at their waterfront facilities and aboard their vessels.*

**BULLETIN NO: 003-26**

**Date: May 05, 2026**

### **SUBJECT: SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR SMALL VESSELS NAVIGATING IN PUGET SOUND TRAFFIC LANES**

This bulletin provides navigation safety information to commercial fishermen and other small vessel operators who fish or navigate in and around the Puget Sound and adjacent waterways. To minimize the risk of accidents, all maritime operators must understand the traffic lane locations, boundaries, and be prepared to communicate their maneuvering intentions with larger commercial vessels. Additional information regarding this and general application best practices can be found in the attached application guide.

For more information, please contact LCDR Ian McPhillips at [SectorPugetSoundWWM@uscg.mil](mailto:SectorPugetSoundWWM@uscg.mil).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. A. McDonnell".

Digitally signed by  
MCDONNELL.MARK.A.1030746909  
Date: 2026.05.05 09:34:23 -0700

M. A. McDonnell  
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard  
Captain of the Port, Sector Puget Sound

# Safety of Navigation

This bulletin provides navigation safety information to small vessel operators and fishing vessel operators who fish or navigate in and around the Puget Sound and adjacent waters within the Traffic Separation Scheme. To minimize the risk of accidents, all maritime operators must understand the traffic lane locations, boundaries, and be prepared to communicate their maneuvering intentions with larger commercial vessels.

## 1. Understanding the Regulatory Framework

The 72 COLREGS shall apply on all waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, all waters of the Haro Strait and the Strait of Georgia, and all waters of the Puget Sound and adjacent waters, including Lake Union, Lake Washington, Hood Canal, and all tributaries.

## 2. Key Safety Recommendations for All Vessels

- **Monitor VHF Channels:**
  - Vessel Traffic Service (VTS): VTS monitors VHF channel 5A North of Everett and in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, VHF channel 14 south of Everett (VTS primary channels), and channels 13 and 16.
  - Bridge to Bridge: Use channel 13 to communicate maneuvering intentions with other vessels
  - Emergency Channel: Monitor channel 16 for distress and safety calls
- **Safe Navigation Practices:** All vessels transiting the VTS area are subject to the 72 COLREGS and must observe all practices of safe navigation and prudent seamanship.

## 3. Key COLREGS Reminders

- **Rule 9 (Narrow Channels):** Rule 9 outlines safe navigation in narrow channels. Small craft and sailing vessels should avoid impeding other vessels and execute prudent seamanship to avoid unsafe conditions in narrow channels.
  - **Stay to the starboard side:** Vessels proceeding along a narrow channel or fairway must keep as near to the outer limit of the channel or fairway which lies on their starboard side as is safe and practicable.
  - **Don't impede:** Vessels of less than 20 meters in length or sailing vessels shall not impede the passage of a vessel which can only safely navigate within a narrow channel or fairway.
  - **Fishing Vessels:** Fishing vessels shall not impede the passage of any other vessel navigating within a narrow channel or fairway.
  - **Overtaking:** When overtaking in a narrow channel, the vessel intending to overtake must sound the appropriate sound signal (one short blast to overtake on the starboard side, two short blasts to overtake on the port side) and only proceed if the overtaken vessel agrees. If the overtaken vessel is in doubt, they shall sound the danger signal (five short, rapid blasts).

# Safety of Navigation

- **Bend/Obstruction:** Vessels nearing a bend or an area of a narrow channel or fairway where other vessels may be obscured by an intervening obstruction shall navigate with particular alertness and caution and shall sound one prolonged blast.
- **Avoid Anchoring:** As much as possible, avoid anchoring in a narrow channel.
- **Rule 10 (Traffic Separation Schemes):** Rule 10 mandates specific conduct while within Traffic Separation Schemes (TSS) to promote safe navigation of vessels and reduce the possibility of collisions, especially in areas of high vessel traffic.
  - **Using a TSS:** If using a TSS, you must:
    - Proceed in the **appropriate traffic lane** in the **general direction of traffic flow** for that lane.
    - Keep **clear of a separation zone or separation line**, unless you must cross it.
    - **Normally join or leave a traffic lane at the termination of the lane**, but when joining or leaving from the side, do so at **as small an angle to the general direction of traffic flow as practicable**.
  - **Small Vessels/Fishing Vessels:** Vessels of less than 20 meters in length or sailing vessels shall **not impede the safe passage of a power-driven vessel following a traffic lane**.
    - **Fishing Vessels** are permitted to fish within the separation zone, as to not impede the safe passage of any vessel following a traffic lane.
  - **Exceptions:** A vessel **shall not use a traffic separation scheme when it can safely use an adjacent route**.
  - **Entering a Separation Zone:** A vessel other than a crossing vessel or a vessel joining or leaving a lane shall not normally enter a separation zone or cross a separation line except:
    - In cases of emergency to avoid immediate danger.

The Puget Sound Traffic Separation Scheme includes:

- **Northern, Southern, and Western Approaches in relation to the SA Buoy (Parts I-III).** Each includes a separation zone and two traffic lanes.

#### 4. **Emergency Contacts and Additional Information**

- Contact VTS on VHF channel 5A in the Strait and North of Everett, channel 14 south of Everett, or by phone at (206) 217-6152 for information on vessel movements.
- Contact USCG Sector Puget Sound Command Center at (206) 217-6002 to report unsafe operations or conditions within the port.

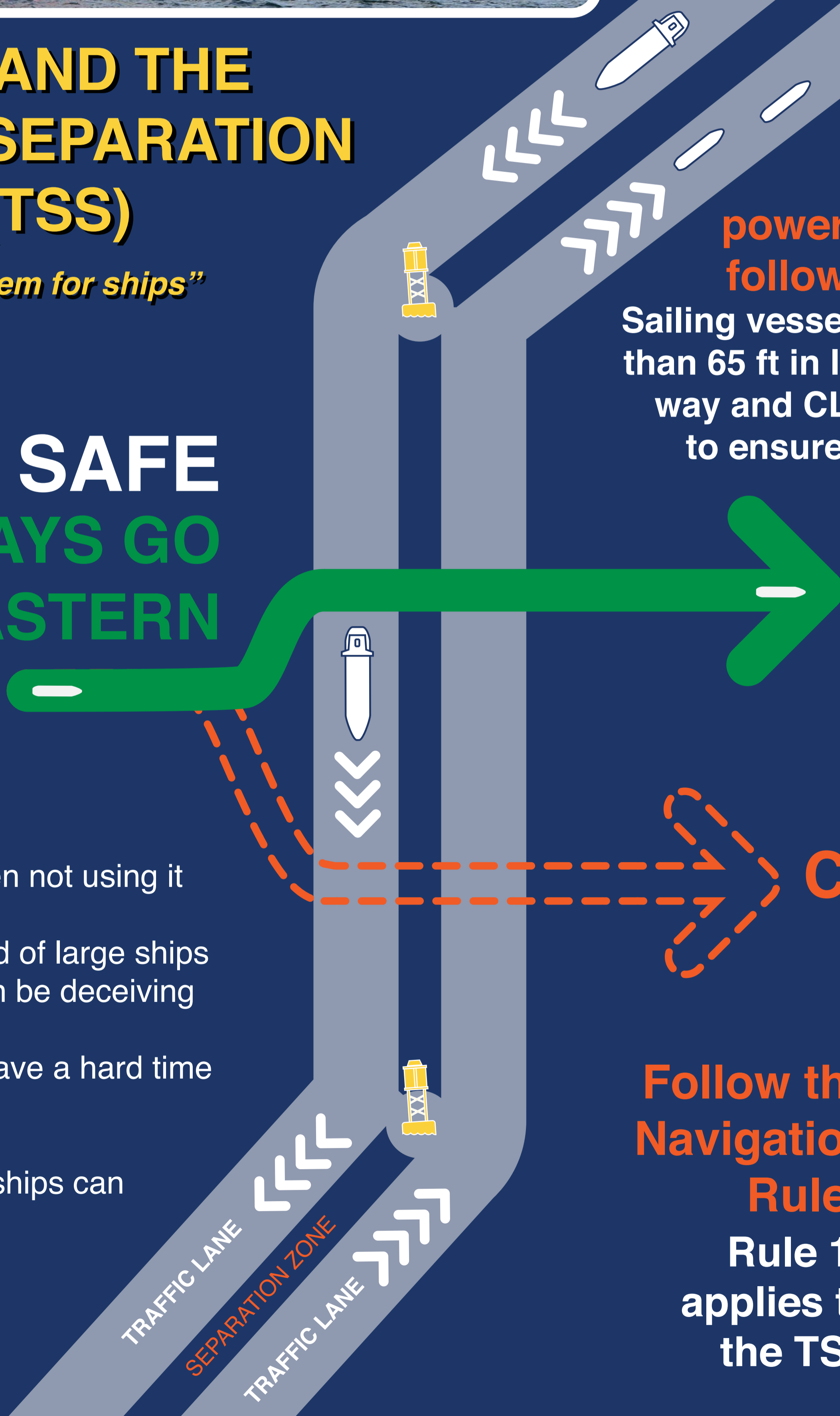


# UNDERSTAND THE TRAFFIC SEPARATION SCHEME (TSS)

*"The highway system for ships"*

**PLAY IT SAFE**  
ALWAYS GO  
ASTERN

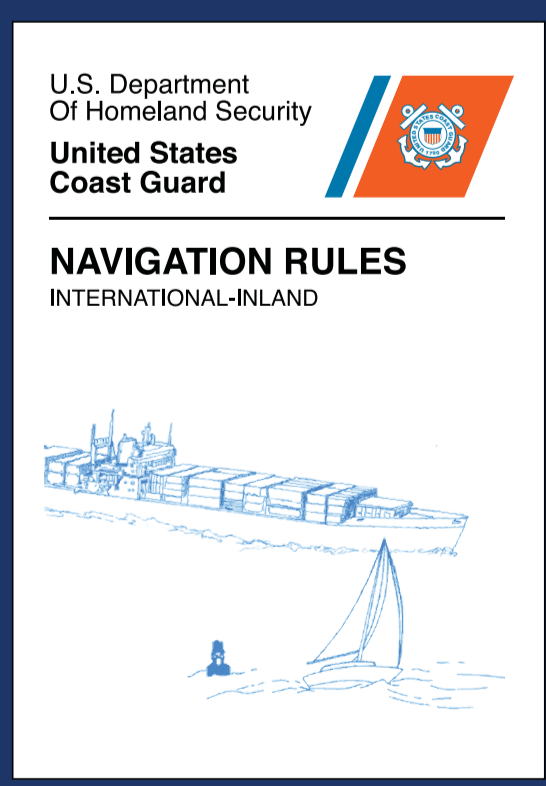
- o Avoid the TSS when not using it
- o The size and speed of large ships using the lanes can be deceiving
- o Large ships may have a hard time seeing you
- o Wakes from large ships can be hazardous



**DO NOT IMPEDE**  
power driven ships following the lanes  
Sailing vessels and craft less than 65 ft in length must give way and CLEAR THE LANE to ensure safe navigation

**NEVER CROSS IN FRONT**

**Follow the Navigation Rules**  
Rule 10 applies to the TSS



**SAFE NAVIGATION + PRUDENT SEAMANSHIP = PROTECTING OUR SOUND & OUR ENVIRONMENT**



**Listen to VTS on VHF-FM Channel 14 or 05A**



[www.pacificarea.uscg.mil/VTSPugetSound](http://www.pacificarea.uscg.mil/VTSPugetSound)

