

VESSEL TRAFFIC SERVICES (VTS) NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR OPERATING



**COMDTINST 16630.3B
February 2023**

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U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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08 FEB 2023

COMMANDANT INSTRUCTION 16630.3B

Subj: VESSEL TRAFFIC SERVICES (VTS) NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR OPERATING

- Ref:
- (a) IALA VTS Manual, Edition 8 (2021)
 - (b) U.S. Coast Guard Sector Organizational Manual, COMDTINST M5401.6 (series)
 - (c) Pay Administration Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, 5 CFR § 551
 - (d) Civilian Employee Drug-free Workplace Program, COMDTINST M12792.4 (series)
 - (e) Military Substance Abuse and Behavioral Addiction Program, COMDTINST 1000.10 (series)
 - (f) Safety and Environmental Health Manual, COMDTINST M5100.47 (series)
 - (g) Records & Information Management Program Roles and Responsibilities, COMDTINST 5212.12 (series)
 - (h) The Coast Guard Freedom of Information (FOIA) and Privacy Acts Manual, COMDTINST M5260.3 (series)
 - (i) Standards for Training and Certification of VTS Personnel, IALA Recommendation R013 V-103, Edition 3.0, December 2020
 - (j) U.S. Coast Guard Competency Management System Manual, COMDTINST M5300.2 (series)
 - (k) Vessel Traffic Services Operations, IALA Recommendation R0127 (V-127)
 - (l) IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases, International Maritime Organization Resolution A.918(22)
 - (m) Continuity of Operations, Policy and Planning, COMDTINST M3010.15 (series)

1. PURPOSE. This Instruction updates the Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) National Standards for Operating. This policy contains guidance, and general information about VTS operations, administration, procedures, and training. This Instruction specifically provides policy guidance for all VTS's to develop local standard operating procedures. Due to familiarity this Instruction may be referred to as the VTS NSOP.
2. ACTION. All Coast Guard unit commanders, commanding officers, officers-in-charge, deputy/assistant commandants, chief of headquarter directorates must comply with the policies contained.
3. AUTHORIZED RELEASE. Internet release is not authorized.

4. DIRECTIVES AFFECTED. Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) National Standard Operating Procedures (NSOP), COMDTINST M16630.3A is hereby cancelled.
5. BACKGROUND.
 - a. Congress passed the Ports and Waterways Safety Act (PWSA) of 1972 to prevent damage to, or the destruction or loss of any vessel, bridge, or other structure on or in the navigable waters of the United States. This is the major goal and objective of a VTS. Through the practiced use of communications and surveillance equipment, and Captain of the Port (COTP) or VTS specific regulatory authority when necessary, VTS' are able to reduce the risk of vessel collisions and groundings. VTS' also have the capability to undertake defense- and security-related responsibilities specified by Maritime Defense Zone (MDZ) commanders, monitor aids to navigation and anchorages, and provide Search and Rescue (SAR) and law-security enforcement assistance.
 - b. This Instruction and its accompanying appendix provide programmatic guidance to all Coast Guard (CG) Sectors and Vessel Traffic Services. VTS Directors shall ensure that all VTS personnel receive a thorough indoctrination in the appropriate sections of these Standards for Operating. A thorough knowledge and understanding of these standards by all VTS personnel is essential to the proper execution of assigned duties.
 - c. Every effort has been made to make this Instruction useful and applicable to all VTS operations. In situations where this Instruction does not address a specific procedure or situation and the application of a particular provision is unclear, users should seek clarification from their reporting senior and advise the VTS Program Manager of the need to clarify the provision in question.
 - d. The diverse nature of local VTS functions, responsibilities and internal/external relationships, means that this Instruction cannot and is not intended to cover every procedural variation that may be encountered. VTS Directors must rely on their leadership and management skills, sound judgment, business practices, and common sense.
 - e. In cases of apparent conflict between policy stated in this Instruction and provisions of statues and regulations, the statutory or regulatory provisions shall be applied, and the VTS Program Manager shall be advised of the apparent conflict at the earliest opportunity. Likewise, in cases of apparent conflict with current local practice, the VTS Program Manager shall be contacted at the earliest opportunity for resolution of the matter.
6. DISCLAIMER. This guidance is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements, nor is it itself a rule. It is intended to provide administrative guidance for Coast Guard personnel and is not intended nor does it impose legally-binding requirements on any party outside the Coast Guard.

7. MAJOR CHANGES. Several changes have been made to this Instruction:
 - a. This Instruction has been renamed from the Vessel Traffic Services National Standard Operating Procedures to the Vessel Traffic Services National Standards For Operating due to changes in Instruction naming conventions.
 - b. This document has been restructured to comply with new policy directives which change all Manuals to Instructions.
 - c. Removed VTS Organization and Staffing information, will be included in future update to Reference (b).
 - d. Removed references to VTS Incident Review Board (IRB).
 - e. Updated Chapter 6 to include Assertive Communications, Emergency Communications using SMCP, and Communicating Directions procedures for VTS Watchstanders.
 - f. Updated qualification, requalification, and qualification refresher requirements for VTS Watch Supervisors and Operators.
 - g. Removed references to IALA VTS World Guide.
 - h. Reduced OPEVAL checklist to 31 factors.
 - i. Removed requirement for a ship rider and facility visit program.
8. SCOPE AND AUTHORITIES. VTS Directors may expand on the guidance contained in this Instruction when needed; e.g., when information unique to a particular VTS is required. However, VTS Directors may not change guidance provided by the Commandant and may not change the format of this Instruction. Using this Instruction and Reference (a) as a guide for content, each VTS Director shall create and maintain Internal Operating Procedures (IOP) that detail policies and procedures for VTS administration and operations, and may be included as a part of the local command's SOP.
9. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS. The Office of Environmental Management, Commandant (CG-47) reviewed this Commandant Instruction and the general policies contained within, and determined that this policy falls under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) categorical exclusion A3. This Commandant Instruction will not result in any substantial change to existing environmental conditions or violation of any applicable federal, state, or local laws relating to the protection of the environment. It is the responsibility of the action proponent to evaluate all future specific actions resulting from this policy for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), other applicable environmental requirements, and the U.S. Coast Guard Environmental Planning Policy, COMDTINST 5090.1 (series).