

Circular From GARD

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Reducing the risk of collisions at sea

Failure to maintain a proper lookout and to take early avoiding action are common contributing factors to collisions, say Australian authorities.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) has published [Marine Notice 06/2020](#) reminding vessel owners, operators, masters, watchkeepers, and other personnel involved in the navigation of vessels, of the importance of adhering to the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 (COLREGs). Investigations into 41 collisions over 26 years have identified failure to maintain a proper lookout and to take early avoiding action as common contributing factors to collisions and AMSA emphasises that watchkeepers need to be aware that any distraction from their duties can have a negative impact on safety. Management of fatigue is also highlighted as a recognised way of minimising distraction.

Proper lookout

Maintaining a proper lookout is a vital element of good watchkeeping practice, particularly when visibility is restricted. A proper lookout by sight and hearing should involve the use of all available means, to detect the presence of other vessels. AMSA considers the following as ways to keep a proper lookout:

- regular visual scans of the entire horizon (360 degrees),
- effective use of the vessel's radar,
- use of Automatic Identification System (AIS) to:
- locate targets in the area, and
 - transmit accurate data,
 - a quiet wheelhouse to allow for VHF radio calls and sound signals to be heard, and
 - all other available means to maintain good situational awareness. Watchkeepers need to be aware that any distraction from their duties can have a negative impact on safety.

We recommend that Masters frequently check to ensure that a proper lookout is posted, especially during periods of darkness or restricted visibility. The vessel's logbook should show the names and periods of the posted lookout. The lookout should be encouraged to report any concerns arising during watchkeeping to the officer of the watch (OOW). Any observations by the lookout should be taken seriously and appropriate acknowledgements should be made and actions taken.

General responsibility

COLREGs apply to all vessels, regardless of size or nature of operation, in all navigable waters, from inland waters to the high seas and vessel operators and masters are responsible for ensuring that personnel involved in the navigation of vessels have an in depth knowledge of navigational practices and a full understanding of the regulations.

Watchkeeping, either underway, at anchorage or in port is a fundamental duty in the operation of a vessel, for the safety of life and property and the protection of the marine environment. The bridge of any vessel should always be appropriately manned and the person in charge of a navigational watch should not undertake any other duties that would interfere with the safe navigation of the vessel. A continuous listening watch on VHF Channel 16 should be maintained by all bridge watchkeepers.

Source of Information: The Gard P&I Club