

MARINE SAFETY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Volume XXV Issue: 034

Time: 12:00 p.m.

Date: April 19, 2025

High Water Safety Advisory: VTS Safety Measure and Advisories for Line Tows Transiting Wilkinson Point at LMR MM 232 TO MM 237 AHP LMR (38' and Rising)

Due to technical difficulties, VTS LMR will shift from VHF-FM CH 1063 (63A) to CH 12 on April 19, 2025 for Baton Rouge/Wilkinson Point communications.

1. As a result of the Baton Rouge gauge expected to reach **38' and continue to rise**, the COTP New Orleans has issued a Safety Advisory and VTS Safety Measure **effective Sunday April 20th at 0700 A.M.** for all waters of the Lower Mississippi River (LMR) from Mile 232 to Mile 237 Above Head of Passes (AHP) in the vicinity of Wilkinson Point in accordance with the Waterways Action Plan Baton Rouge Annex. This VTS Measure is needed to protect persons and vessels from the potential safety hazards associated with the effects of high water levels on the LMR. VTS LMR has the authority to grant exceptions to the requirements in this bulletin based on the conditions and the size of the tow.
2. **Line Tows Transiting Wilkinson Point: VTS Safety Measure and Advisories:**
 - A. **VTS LMR has implemented the VTS Wilkinson Point Vessel Movement Reporting System.** Northbound vessels have priority in the queue at night. Vessels may contact New Orleans VTS LMR on VHF Channel 1063 (63A) or (504) 365-2512.
 - B. A VTS Safety Measure is established for the area with the following requirements:
 - a. **Max tow size is limited to 30 barges** with 280 HP per standard barge and 650 HP per oversize barge for southbound transits within the VTS regulated area. Empty barges may be calculated at ½ the horsepower requirements to that of a loaded barge when computing the overall horsepower requirement. Vessels unable to meet the HP requirements must make adjustments to meet the requirements prior to transiting Wilkinson Point. Towing vessels with Z-drive propulsion types may be treated as having a horsepower 20% greater than the engine's rating for the purpose of this calculation. VTS LMR may on a case-by-case basis approve exceptions up to 400 HP based on conditions and size of tow. VTS LMR may make horsepower exceptions to allow pushing up to 2 standard barges more than calculated for tows that are fully squared off.
 - b. 8000 HP towing vessel may push 30 standard barge tow makeups. (400 HP less than requirement) or 6600 HP Z-drive.
 - c. All southbound tows entering Devil's Swamp with more than one barge attached shall hire a private assist vessel (PAV) to accompany them into the swamp and contact VTS LMR to enter the queue.
 - d. Harbor Fleet Tows of 4 barges or less (whether loaded or unloaded) are exempt from daylight only and flanking restrictions, but must coordinate transits with VTS LMR.
 - C. No more than two southbound towing vessels will be allowed below Thomas Point at any time regardless of tow size.
 - D. **All southbound traffic will transit Wilkinson point during daylight hours only.** Northbound traffic may transit Wilkinson Point any time during which the queue is empty of South bound traffic. Northbound vessels will have priority in the queue at night. Passenger Vessels will have a priority position in the queue.
 - E. Northbound vessels unable to average 3 MPH between the I-10 and Highway 190 bridges and around Wilkinson Point must use a Private Assist Vessel (PAV).
 - F. VTS LMR has established a "no meeting or overtaking zone" for MM 232 AHP to MM 237 AHP (Note: VTS LMR may allow a deviation from this restriction).

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- G. Tank barges shall be placed in a protected position in the tow makeup (not on the head of the tow or on either outboard string).
- H. Tows shall be squared off. On tows with 6 or more barges, there shall be no spiked barges that extend 50' beyond the head of the tow. VTS may grant exceptions to this requirement on a case-by-case basis based on conditions and the size of tow.
- I. VTS LMR will carry out their mission IAW the Waterways Action Plan, which will include managing the vessel queue at Wilkinson Point, resources permitting. VTS LMR will establish "check in/reporting procedures" for downbound tows at MM255 (Port Hudson Light) and MM240 (Thomas Point), as well as upbound vessels at MM219 (Sardine Crossing) and MM226 (Bottom of Baton Rouge Anchorage). All tows operating between MM 219 to MM 255 will be required to provide a sail plan to VTS LMR with the following information:
 - a. Name of Vessel.
 - b. Current location.
 - c. Vessel type and horsepower.
 - d. Number of loaded barges & number of empty barges.
 - e. Number of red flag barges in the tow.

3. Line Tows Transiting Wilkinson Point: Towing Assist Vessel (TAV):

- A. All southbound traffic will utilize the Towing Assist Vessel (TAV, min 5000 HP). The TAV must meet the southbound vessel no lower than 2000 feet above Wilkinson Point. The TAV will position itself alongside the most appropriate agreed upon location on the barge tow after consultation with the vessel's Captain.
- B. The TAV will then confirm information of current reaction above, around and below Wilkinson Point.
- C. The TAV will discuss what the last vessel that transited Wilkinson Point found and continually brief southbound vessels of present position in correlation with the last vessel that transited.
- D. The TAV will make corrections to the southbound vessel's positioning if necessary.
- E. Fleet boats transiting Wilkinson Point pushing 4 barges or less are exempt from the TAV queue, but still must check-in with VTS LMR and the TAV prior to transit.
- F. There will be a LOMRC representative onboard the assist vessel with Pilots on scene to ensure safe navigation. The TAV Captain/Pilot may satisfy this requirement provided they are familiar with this Waterways Action Plan and the current MSIB.

For further information, contact the following:

Vessel Traffic Service Lower Mississippi River: (504) 365-2512, VHF-FM CH 1005 (05A), CH 12, & 67

Coast Guard Baton Rouge Waterways Management: (225) 298-5400 x 230

Coast Guard Sector New Orleans Waterways Management: (504) 365-2278

Coast Guard Sector Command Center New Orleans (24 hours): (504) 365-2209



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