



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Safety Alert 05-26

HAZARDS OF BOTTOM-CONTACT OPERATIONS NEAR OFFSHORE PIPELINE INSTALLATIONS

A recent marine casualty resulting in the capsizing and subsequent loss of life onboard a commercial fishing vessel has highlighted the inherent risks associated with trawling and other bottom-contact operations conducted in proximity to offshore pipeline installations. The vessel, a shrimp trawler, was conducting bottom trawling operations utilizing an otter trawl configuration. The subsequent capsizing occurred within twenty feet of a charted, submerged, natural gas pipeline. The role of the pipeline in this marine casualty is still being evaluated. Based on the investigation's preliminary findings, the Coast Guard is issuing this Safety Alert to raise awareness of the potential hazards associated with trawling near offshore pipeline installations or other charted obstructions.

[Title 49 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) Section 192.327](#) establishes minimum depth-of-cover requirements for certain offshore pipeline installations; however, not all submerged pipelines and structures are required to be covered. Over time, natural processes such as erosion, storm-driven sediment transport, and current-induced scouring can reduce protective coverage, leaving pipelines exposed above the seabed. These exposure events can create significant and often uncharted navigational hazards, particularly for vessels engaged in bottom-contact operations like bottom trawling. Such hazards increase the risk of gear entanglement, sudden loss of vessel stability, and capsizing.

Despite existing regulations, many pipelines remain uncovered, posing serious risks. For instance, the 2021 San Pedro Bay pipeline leak and oil spill resulted from an anchor dragging over a pipeline that was simply laid on the seafloor without protective coverage. Recognizing these dangers, the Coast Guard issued [Marine Safety Information Bulletin 05-24](#) in May 2024, emphasizing that anchoring or operating near submerged pipeline areas can create hazardous conditions. Such conditions must be reported to the Coast Guard under [33 CFR § 160.202](#) and [160.216](#), underscoring the importance of vigilance and compliance to mitigate risks associated with exposed pipelines.

The Coast Guard **strongly recommends** that vessels engaged in bottom-contact operations:

- Regularly reference the most up-to-date National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Electronic Navigational Charts, which identify offshore pipeline installations.
- Avoid bottom contact operations, such as trawling, in proximity to known or charted offshore pipeline installations.

- Immediately report any identified or known pipeline exposures or incursions to the nearest United States Coast Guard office.

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