



Procedures to Follow While Operating Near Submarine Fiber Optic Cables

PURPOSE OF THESE PROCEDURES

These procedures have been developed by joint committees of the telecommunications and trawl fishing industries for trawl fishermen to use as a guide for responsible conduct in the vicinity of submarine cables. These procedures are intended to protect submarine cables from being damaged by contact with trawl gear. Fishermen who sign agreements with companies maintaining submarine cables in their area and follow these procedures are protected from liability for ordinary negligence. Participation and compliance also provides for defined compensation for trawl gear sacrificed to avoid damage to a submarine cable.

SAFETY FIRST

While cable companies do not encourage trawling over submarine cables, these procedures define how vessels should operate when fishing in the vicinity of cables. These procedures do not change the vessel operator's authority and responsibility to care for the safety of crewmembers, passengers, and the vessel, taking all relevant factors into account. **No step in these procedures should be followed if doing so would be unsafe.**

PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW WHEN OPERATING NEAR A CABLE

For purposes of these procedures, a vessel is considered "near" a cable if the distance from the vessel to the charted position of the cable is equal to or less than:

- 3 times the depth of water, in depths of 150 fathoms (300 meters) or more, or
- 4 times the depth of water, in depths of less than 150 fathoms (300 meters).

A vessel relying on LORAN C instead of GPS or DGPS should assume a potential error of ½ nautical mile in the vessel's position and should consider itself "near" a cable if it is within ½ nautical mile plus three times the depth of water of the charted position of the cable.

WHENEVER OPERATING "NEAR" A CABLE, A VESSEL MUST COMPLY WITH ALL OF THE FOLLOWING STEPS, 1 THROUGH 7:

1. The vessel shall have on board in usable form the most current nautical chart information, including all of the following:
 - a) the latest NOAA chart (paper or electronic);
 - b) any updates from Local Notices to Mariners;
 - c) any updates made available by a local cable/fishermen liaison committee (the "Committee"), such as information regarding cable burial status; and
 - d) information made available by companies operating submarine cables in the vicinity.
2. Anyone acting as helmsman "near" a cable must understand and be able to implement these procedures.
3. If a vessel has an electronic or video chart plotter, the route of the cable shall be displayed

on the plotter screen or display. If the vessel has gear on the bottom “near” a cable, the plotter shall be recording the tow.

4. When operating “near” a cable, special care should be observed. Gear should not be set or hauled up. No turns of more than 90 degrees should be executed and no activity that lays a door down should be executed.

5. No clam or scallop dredge, anchor, grapple, or other gear designed to significantly penetrate the surface of the seabed should be used “near” a cable. All trawl gear should be in good condition and free of elements that could snag cables.

6. Gear should not be in contact with the seabed over any location where a cable is reported or known to be unburied. **Vessels shall not tow within a Known Cable Exposure (KCE) safety zone with gear on the seabed.**

7. The helmsman should closely monitor the groundspeed by the most accurate means available when “near” a cable and monitor the video plotter display for any sign of possible cable contact.

PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW IN CASE OF POSSIBLE CABLE CONTACT

1. In case of any deviation from normal towing conditions, the helmsman (if other than the Master) shall summon the Master to the bridge. The Master of the vessel shall take all appropriate action to keep the vessel safe and to protect the cable.

2. If conditions such as reduced speed or course deviation near a cable suggest possible cable contact, the operator shall take the vessel out of gear.

3. No attempt shall be made to free the gear by hauling up the gear or by powering up the vessel.

4. The Master shall call the cable operator and supply all requested information.

5. Vessel shall cut away gear if advised by the cable operator that the stated location indicates a possible cable contact. The Master shall call the Committee for the provision of replacement gear.

6. In any case of a possible or known cable contact, the Master and helmsman shall file a report with the Committee immediately upon returning to port; preserve all related records (including tow records); and cooperate with any investigation by the Committee and/or the cable company.