



Marine Safety Information Bulletin

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MSIB Number: 001-22
Date: April 08, 2022
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Great Lakes Load Lines and Single Voyage Load Lines

The Ninth Coast Guard District is issuing this Marine Safety Information Bulletin (MSIB) to assist mariners in identifying Great Lakes Load Line regulations for U.S. vessels operating solely within the Great Lakes. Additionally, this MSIB will discuss the requirements for a non-load lined U.S. vessel that needs to make a “positioning” or single voyage within the waters of the Great Lakes, for which a load line assignment would normally be required.

Purpose of a Great Lakes Load Line

The purpose of a Great Lakes Load Line assignment is to ensure the overall sea-worthiness of a U.S. vessel operating solely within the waters of the Great Lakes. This is accomplished by ensuring that the vessel possesses a robust and intact hull condition, weather-tight and watertight integrity of hull penetrations and superstructure openings, reserve buoyancy, adequate stability for loading and operating conditions, and the ability to rapidly drain water from its deck(s). The Great Lakes Load Line assignment also requires periodic inspections by qualified personnel to verify that a vessel's sea-worthiness remains satisfactory as outlined by its Great Lakes Load Line Certificate.

Great Lakes Load Line Applicability, Authority and Jurisdiction

In accordance with Title 46, Code of Federal Regulation (C.F.R.) § 42.03-5 (c), a U.S. vessel 79 feet or greater and at least 150 gross tons or over that engages in voyages solely on Great Lakes voyages is subject to the Load Line regulations and must comply with the regulations in force at the time of construction. Per 46 C.F.R. § 42.07-35, the American Bureau of Shipping (ABS) is the issuing authority for U.S. vessels that require a Load Line.

The extent of the Great Lakes is defined in 46 C.F.R. § 42.03-15, and further explained in the USCG Load Line Policy Notes as: Including all of the Great Lakes (including their bays, sounds, straits, and those harbors that are beyond the breakwaters that form complete protection against heavy seas and other rigors of the lakes). This does not include the rivers or tributaries that connect to the waters described above.

Single Voyage Load Lines/Positioning Voyages

At times, there may be occasions for a non-load lined U.S. vessel to make a single Great Lakes or positioning voyage, for which a load line assignment would normally be required. Per 46 CFR § 42.03-30, a single-voyage exemption is intended for exceptional circumstances; which does not include regular vessel movements associated with the normal operations or routine employment of the vessel. As stated in CG-543 Policy Letter 10-01, examples of exceptional circumstances for the purpose of single voyage load line authorization include:

- Where the owner changes the location of his or her business operations, and desires merely to move his or her craft to the new base of operations and not in fulfillment of any contract;
- Where the owner sells his or her business or one of his or her vessels to another and it is necessary to move the vessel or vessels to the location specified by the new owner;
- Where a voyage is necessary to deliver a new vessel to its owner at a port other than where the craft was constructed;

- Where a voyage is made to another port for the purpose of making repairs or alterations; and
- Where a vessel that is not otherwise subject to the load line provision (because it operates exclusively inside the Boundary Line) must make a single transit outside the Boundary Line to reach a new location for operations exclusively inside the Boundary Line.

Requests for a single-voyage load line exemption should be made in writing by the vessel's owner/operator to the Officer in Charge of Marine Inspection (OCMI) of the port of departure as soon as practicable, and with as much lead time as possible.

A return voyage, if needed, shall be treated as a separate voyage, and a new exemption must be requested from the OCMI of the departure port. With all requests for a Great Lakes Load Line exemption, a Seaworthiness Survey must be completed in conjunction with each request.

Seaworthiness Survey

The OCMI for the vessel's departure port will conduct a Seaworthiness Survey to determine the suitability and safety of the vessel to make a voyage on the Great Lakes. The extent of the Seaworthiness Survey shall include, but is not limited to, examination to determine the condition and strength of the vessel hull, the integrity of closures and hatches, and satisfactory vessel stability for the voyage.

In order to determine a vessel's stability and the strength and condition of its hull, it may be necessary to examine the internal structural members, which may include confined spaces. Coast Guard Marine Inspectors shall only enter confined spaces aboard commercial vessels **after** the space has been certified as an "Atmosphere Safe for Workers" by a National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) Certificated Marine Chemist.

At the conclusion of the Seaworthiness Survey, the OCMI shall specify the conditions for the voyage if approved, which may include requirements for repairs or alterations.

Single Voyage Load Line Conditions

If granted, the exemption authorization shall specify the conditions under which the single voyage may be made. This will include the ports of departure and arrival, period of validity and may include additional stipulations such as weather or wave parameters. The vessel is not permitted to carry passengers or commercial cargo during the voyage, however, it may carry company equipment.

This MSIB is provided for information purposes only and does not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational, or material requirements. For additional information or inquiries, please contact Mr. Kirk Beckmann at (216) 902-6050 or email at kirk.j.beckmann2@uscg.mil

Sincerely,

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By direction