

New 'No Discharge Zone' prohibiting the discharge of sewage in all California marine waters

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has recently finalized a rule in response to an application from the State of California and establishes a No Discharge Zone (NDZ)¹ for large vessels in all California marine waters.



[Larger view \(PDF\)](#)

In accordance with the new rule, the following vessels will be prohibited from discharging any sewage, whether treated or not, while in California marine waters:

- Large passenger vessels of 300 gross tons or more with berths or overnight accommodation for passengers.
- Large ocean-going vessels of 300 gross tons or more, including private, commercial, government, or military vessels equipped with a holding tank with remaining capacity at the time of entry or containing sewage generated prior to entry into California marine waters.

For the purposes of the new rule, 'California marine waters' means "the territorial sea measured from the baseline as determined in accordance with the Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone and extending seaward a distance of three miles, and all enclosed bays and estuaries subject to tidal influences from the Oregon border (41.999325 North Latitude, 124.212110 West Longitude, decimal degrees, NAD 1983) to the Mexican border (32.471231 North Latitude, 117.137814 West Longitude, decimal degrees, NAD 1983)." The new requirements are consistent with the large vessel discharge bans already implemented in the four California marine sanctuaries that are overseen by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Other California NDZs remain in force for all vessels (not just for large vessels). A map illustrating the affected waters is included herein but for additional and more detailed information, please refer to EPA's [Fact Sheet for the California NDZ Prohibiting Vessel Sewage in California Marine Waters](#).

The new rule is expected to enter into force in mid-March 2012 and Members and Clients with vessels of 300 gross tons or more calling at ports in California should take note of the established NDZ and prepare for compliance through appropriate voyage planning and sewage treatment/disposal as relevant. Sewage discharges from vessels other than those covered by the new rule will continue to be regulated under the existing Clean Water Act² requirements, which generally require sewage to be treated by approved marine sanitation devices prior to discharge.

A number of U.S. States have designated some or all of their surface waters as NDZs and Members and Clients operating in the U.S. should ensure that they have up to date information on all the designated NDZs in their operational areas. A list of established NDZs may be found at EPA's web page under [No Discharge Zones by State](#). Maps of established NDZs may be found at [Where you Live: Find No Discharge Programs](#).

¹ A no discharge zone (NDZ) for vessel sewage is an area in which both treated and untreated sewage discharges from vessels are prohibited. Within NDZ boundaries, vessel operators are required to retain their sewage discharges onboard for disposal at sea or onshore at a pump-out facility. Federal law prohibits the discharge of untreated sewage from vessels within all navigable waters of the U.S., which include territorial seas within three nautical miles of shore.

² A number of laws serve as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) foundation for protecting the environment and public health, and Section 312 of the United States Clean Water Act (CWA) sets out the principal framework for regulating sewage discharges from vessels in the U.S.