

MEMBER ALERT



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GOOD CATCH UPDATE: **HIGH AND MIGHTY - ANTICIPATING US RIVER HIGH WATER EFFECTS**

Due to spring thaws and rain, high water levels can be expected on the Mississippi River, its tributaries, and most other rivers too. Make a Good Catch by establishing a common understanding of the real-time and forecasted river levels and ensure that agreed upon risk mitigation measures are fully and clearly communicated to the crews!

In this context, your Managers are pleased to present the latest instalment of the Club's *Good Catch* initiative:

- *High and Mighty - Anticipating US River High Water Effects* available in [English](#)

GOOD CATCH from The American Club
High and Mighty
Anticipating US River High Water Effects

It's spring again!
Due to spring thaws and rain, we can expect high water levels on the Mississippi River, its tributaries, and most other rivers too. In addition, high water influences the speed of the current and is increasing flows. The current can vary significantly from one bank to the other and from mile to mile depending on numerous hydrographical factors. Eddies can also form that were not there in lower water levels. All of that can impact vessel maneuverability and increase the risk of vessels experiencing parted moorings, breakaways, parted anchor chains, lost anchors, weather damage, groundings, or collisions.

For the inland towing industry, the Waterway Action Plan identifies specific sections of the rivers where high water levels can be problematic, allowing towmen to better prepare themselves for the challenges and identify measures to mitigate that risk will increase the likelihood of a safe transit, and

The Waterway Action Plan (WAP) provides general information, procedures, and target dates. The ICCC Section on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers maintain WAP updates. The updates provide actions which are the basis for specific class conditions including high water low current high current, and etc. The plan and its updates are reviewed annually by members of the U.S. Coast Guard, the Army Corp of Engineers, and River Industry representatives. Examples of WAP can be found by clicking [here](#).

A key objective of the Waterway Action Plan is to establish a common understanding of the real-time and forecasted river levels. Towing companies should ensure that agreed upon risk mitigation measures are fully and clearly communicated to their crews.

Here are several additional recommendations for inland towing during high water levels:

- Think about and anticipate the impact of the current on your tow at specific locations well before you get there. This plan is intended to be used as a common understanding of the real-time and forecasted river levels. Use your experience, the experience of the pilot, and timely information from other towing vessels to anticipate bends or areas that might be an extra challenge to navigate.

A proactive approach is better than simply planning to react to the current once it starts impacting your tow. Ask yourself "what if instead of 'high water'?"

- a. thinking about the most likely way things could go wrong based on the current and river level at a challenging location;
- b. identifying how you will identify in real time if things begin to go wrong;
- c. then identifying actions you can take to better ensure things do not go wrong such as changes in tow, changes in mooring position and mooring, the availability of escort vessels to help get you through a difficult area, changes to your tow configuration, etc.
- d. considering that while it may be impossible to know exactly how the high water levels will impact your tow, identifying where operations will be challenging and identifying measures to mitigate that risk will increase the likelihood of a safe transit; and
- e. implementing an enhanced level of operational awareness for all other vessels (towing and deep draft) in your vicinity and their movements that may impact your navigation.

For inland towing companies, the size of each tow and the horsepower/burden ratio should be carefully evaluated and assessed as flow conditions change. Similarly, the condition of the engine on each towing vessel should be assessed on the actual horsepower available is considered instead of the advertised horsepower. Further, consider evaluating the experience of the individual captains and crew on your vessel adjusting it and as needed to their abilities and not overly challenged when and where the river levels are most difficult. Moreover, team by doing, and learn to experience challenges to perfect their skills, but they should not be put in situations that are riskier than their current skills and the towing vessel can handle.

GOOD CATCH High and Mighty
Anticipating US River High Water Effects April 2023

Further Consideration for Deep Draft Vessels
For deep draft vessels, the concerns and risk mitigation measures are different, but the risks during periods of high river levels are no less critical whether the vessel is underway, moored alongside or on a mooring buoy.

When a pilot is on the bridge, it is critically important for the active bridge team to fully understand the pilot's operational plan and to be prepared. That plan should take into consideration the expected strength of the river current before getting underway. If there is any uncertainty, or if the plan does not adequately consider certain issues with the vessel's basic operation, or if the plan does not satisfactorily appreciate the time needed for engine speed changes or to get sufficient flow across the vessel, the plan must be discussed and agreed to satisfactorily address all concerns.

It is inadvisable for the Master or bridge navigation team to blindly defer to the pilot. Not only does the Master retain responsibility for the vessel when the pilot is present, the Master is the most familiar with the vessel's handling characteristics.

Additional risk mitigation measures that should be considered when getting underway during high water levels can include:

- a. the use of tags with more horsepower to assist the vessel in maneuvering;
- b. consideration of conducting trials only during daylight hours;
- c. provisions for the Master to have additional crew expertise on the bridge to augment the bridge team;
- d. responsive actions if an anchor becomes fouled or the anchor chain breaks; and
- e. discussion of equipping reference points to monitor vessel orientation, and vessel speed over ground that might provide an early indication that the location is not the true place, and a discussion of available corrective actions.

For vessels moored during high water levels, risk mitigation measures may also include:

- a. the use of additional mooring lines;
- b. the use of hold-on tags at exposed or known high-risk points during periods of strong river currents;
- c. having crew members on a higher level of readiness to respond to relevant high water risks;
- d. alerting the main engine and any thrusters on a very short standby status;
- e. paying special attention to anchor brake settings and the brake lining condition;
- f. considering the effect on mooring lines and the anchor of waves secured to the vessel;
- g. evaluating the impact on mooring lines or the anchor chain should the vessel start to yaw while at anchor or on a mooring buoy;
- h. actions to take should the anchor drag or the anchor chain break; and
- i. consider procedures and communications to logs and line handlers can be ordered on short notice and full awareness of the line needed for them to get on scene.

When you identify a hazard before something goes wrong... **It's a Good Catch.**

When you stop an operation before something bad happens... **It's a Good Catch.**

When you anticipate the challenges from high river levels and identify measures that mitigate the specific risks... **that's a Good Catch, too!**

The American Club would like to specially thank [Shipowners Claims Bureau, Inc.](#) for their contribution to this document.

American Shipowners Owners Mutual Protection & Indemnity Association, Inc.

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As a reminder, all *Good Catch* alerts and animations are posted at the Club's website at:

https://www.american-club.com/page/good_catch

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Your Managers recommend that Members take note of this information and be guided accordingly.