



Visiting a California port anytime soon?

Vessels calling at US ports are reminded that compliance goes beyond federal and international regulations to include state-specific requirements. California, in particular, is known for strictly enforcing its environmental regulations.

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When calling at ports in the United States (US) or transiting US waters, it is always important to bear in mind that state laws may apply in addition to federal regulations. State requirements can be more stringent than those set by US federal authorities and may carry different penalties. As 2026 begins, here are a few key reminders for vessel operators and crews calling at California ports.

Preventing the spread of invasive species

The California [Marine Invasive Species Program \(MISP\)](#) is designed to prevent the introduction of non-indigenous species into state waters. Administered by the California State Lands Commission (SLC), the program applies to vessels of 300 gross registered tons or more that carry, or are capable of carrying, ballast water. On [30 December 2025](#), the SLC reminded vessels calling California ports of the following:

An Annual Vessel Reporting Form (AVRF) must be submitted once per calendar year and at least 24 hours before the vessel's first California port arrival via <https://www.MISP.IO>.

A Ballast Water Management Report (BWMR) must be submitted at least 24 hours prior to each California port call, also when moving between California ports. For voyages under 24 hours, the report must be submitted upon departure from the last port of call. While the US Coast Guard Ballast Water Management Report (OMB No. 1625-0069) must be used, a separate copy must also be submitted to the SLC.

An emergency ballast water management rule, first adopted in June 2025 and recently readopted, requires vessels carrying ballast water sourced from waters with a salinity below 18 part per thousand to conduct a ballast water exchange prior to discharge in the San Francisco Bay area east of, and including, the Port of Rodeo, extending to the Ports of Stockton and Sacramento. This requirement applies in addition to California's [ballast water discharge performance standards](#).

SLC staff inspect at least 25% of arriving vessels to verify MISP compliance. Vessels should have vessel-specific Ballast Water and Biofouling Management Plans, along with Record Books, AVRFs, and BWMRs for the past two years, readily available onboard.

Reducing vessel emissions

The [California Air Resources Board \(CARB\)](#) is the lead agency for the state's climate programs, including enforcement of regulations that limit pollution from commercial marine vessels operating in California waters and ports.

Although California waters fall within the MARPOL Annex VI designated North American ECA, the state continues to enforce its own low sulphur fuel requirements through the [Ocean-Going Vessel \(OGV\) Fuel Regulation](#) . Vessels operating within 24nm of California's coastline are therefore subject to two overlapping sulphur emission regimes. While both limit fuel sulphur content to 0.10%, the CARB OGV Fuel Regulation additionally:

Requires the use of low sulphur distillate fuels only, such as Marine Gas Oil (MGO) or Marine Diesel Oil (MDO), and does not permit compliance through the use of exhaust gas cleaning systems (scrubbers).

Only accepts the use of natural gas, propane, ethanol, methanol, hydrogen, electricity, or fuel cells as alternative fuels. Other alternatives, including biofuels, must be pre-approved by CARB.

CARB also enforces the [OGV At-Berth Regulation](#) , which aims to achieve further emission reductions and provide important public health protection for communities located near California ports. Key requirements include:

All vessels calling at California ports must electronically report visit information to CARB within 30 calendar days of departure, in accordance with Section 93130.7(e)(4) of the regulation.

At the time of writing, container, reefer, passenger, and roll-on/roll off (ro/ro) vessels calling at California ports other than low activity terminals, as well as tankers calling at the Ports of Los Angeles or Long Beach, must use a CARB-approved Emission Control Strategy (CAECS) for the duration of each port visit, e.g. shore power and/or emissions capture and control systems.

From 1 January 2027, tankers calling at all remaining California ports other than low-activity terminals will be subject to the same emission control requirements.

Vessel types such as bulk and general cargo vessels must comply with other relevant obligations under the regulation, including opacity, or blackness of smoke, and visit reporting requirements.

Vessel operators must communicate with terminal operators in writing at least seven days prior to arrival to coordinate shore power and other CAECS needs and availability.

Recommendations

Regulatory requirements may vary between California ports, and proactive confirmation can help avoid delays, non-compliance, or administrative penalties. Vessels trading to the US, and California in particular, are therefore advised to routinely double-check with their local agents and/or the designated Qualified Individual (QI) regarding any regulatory changes or port-specific compliance requirements. Special attention should be given to whether any reporting obligations, form submissions, or other filings are required by local or state agencies, such as the California SLC and CARB.

If uncertainties arise or conflicting information is encountered, operators should contact the local Gard correspondent at the relevant California port of call, as local correspondents are often best positioned to clarify port-specific procedures and expectations.

We also take this opportunity to:

Remind operators that [marine oil pollution violations in California waters](#) can result in substantial monetary fines,

Encourage participation in [California's voluntary speed reduction program](#) , *Blue Whales Blue Skies* . The program was recently signed into law and expanded to a statewide voluntary program through California Assembly Bill 14 ([AB14](#)).