

The Rules

The Coast Guard has established new requirements and rules for licensing mariners who operate towing vessels, whether inspected or uninspected. The interim rule became effective on May 21, 2001, and the final rule became effective on September 15, 2003. As a result, new towing vessel licenses have been created with levels of qualification, enhanced training and operating experience, which also includes practical demonstration of skill. The Coast Guard feels this will ensure that all towing vessels will be manned by officers holding licenses specifically authorizing their service. In addition, it should improve navigational safety for towing vessels. The ruling also disestablished the equivalency that was formerly allowed under 46 CFR Part 15, where a licensed mate of vessels of not more than 200GT, could serve as a second-class (pilot) operator of uninspected towing vessels. The final deadline for full implementation of the rule is May 21, 2006.

The Grandfathering Period (May 21, 2001 to May 21, 2004)

For those that had adequate towing vessel service or training, which began before May 21, 2001, a phase in period was initially provided. These officers were given until May 21, 2004 to convert their licenses from an Operator of Uninspected Towing Vessels (OUTV) or Master/Mate of vessels of not more than 200GRT, to a Mate (Pilot) or Master of Towing Vessel license as applicable. This phase-in or "grandfather" period, was conditionally extended for some mariners provided they had an approved application into one the USCG Regional Examination Centers by May 20th, which gave them until November 21, 2004 to comply with all requirements (complete examinations, etc.) to obtain the Mate (Pilot) or Master of Towing Vessels license. The passing of the two milestone dates, May 21, 2004, and the conditional extension to November 21, 2004 marked and launched the completed conversion to the new towing vessel officer license scheme.

Licenses for Towing Vessels

As of October 14, 2008 a mariner holding a Master of 200 GT or less license, that wishes to be licensed also as a Mate (Pilot) of towing vessels may now do so. You must 36 months of vessel service experience as Master, with a minimum of 30 days training and observation and successfully have the applicable TOAR signed off on a particular route (inland/near coastal, etc.). Next complete a USCG approved training course or take the USCG exams for the apprentice mate (steersman) license and complete radar observer certification. Then serve as an Mate (Pilot) for 18 months and then apply for a Master of towing vessels license. To advance to master, one must have service as mate (pilot), nothing else is required, unless a new route is requested by the mariner to be added and endorsed on their license. Masters or Mates of steam or motor vessels over 200GRT have the authority to operate towing vessels, provided that they have 30 days training and observation on a route(s) documented, and they hold a completed TOAR.

New or "Entry Level" Mariners and all Mariners after May 21, 2006

A mariner new to the towing industry, must gain a total of 18 months of vessel service of which 12 months must be onboard towing vessels. Then they can begin up the towing vessel license levels starting with the apprentice mate (steersman) license.

- References:
- (1) Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular (NVIC) 4-01 May 21, 2001
 - (2) 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 10, Sections 10.463 through 10.466.
 - (3) 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 15.
 - (4) Federal Register/Vol. 73, No. 177/52789

The following sections contain further detailed information about towing vessel licenses, and a career chart and a career path for towing vessel officers on inland or near coastal routes.

Towing Vessel Officer (Abbreviated) Guide

10/03/08

Licenses for Towing Vessels - Service or training on towing vessels after May 21, 2001, and for any other officer seeking a license as officer of towing vessels after May 21, 2001. Some of the following paths to obtain a towing vessel license will require attendance of a Coast Guard approved training course, with proficiency demonstrations using a Towing Officer Assessment Record (TOAR) for the applicable route (Oceans/Near Coastal, Inland/Great Lakes, Western Rivers, etc.), and in some cases taking the Coast Guard license exams or a limited exam.

New Towing License Progression for Service, Training, and Exam Requirements						
License	Total Service	Service 3	Time on Route	TOAR or Approved Training Program	Exam	Days of Observation for New Route(s)
Master of Towing Vessels	48 months	Service as Mate (Pilot) 18 months (up to 180 days can be harbor assist)	90 days	NO 1	NO 1	90 days for increase in the scope of routes on the license.
Mate (Pilot) of Towing Vessels	30 months	Service as Apprentice Mate 12 months	90 days	YES	NO 1	
Apprentice Mate (Steersman)	18 months	Service on Towing Vessels 12 months	90 days	NO	YES 2	90 days on any route.
1. TOAR or Approved Training Course and Limited Exam may be required if not previously completed for route. 2. Coast Guard exam for Apprentice Mate or Mate; or approved course in lieu of Apprentice Mate or Mate Examinations. 3. Time of service requirements as an apprentice mate (steersman) of towing vessels may be reduced by an amount equal to the time specified in the approval letter for a completed Coast Guard-approved training program (Effective October 14, 2008).						

To Apprentice Mate (Steersman) of Towing Vessels - 18 months service; pass USCG Apprentice Mate exam or #2. above ; 12 months on towing vessels; and 3 months on route(s).

Apprentice Mate to Mate (Pilot) of Towing Vessels - 12 months service as Apprentice Mate; TOAR or Approved Course; 3 months on route(s); Radar Observer Certificate.

Mate to Master of Towing Vessels - 18 months service as Mate; 12 months of experience other than local limited area; 3 months on route(s).

Master of Towing Vessel (Limited) to Mate (Pilot) of Towing Vessels - 6 months as Master; Minimum of 30 day of training & observation on route(s); exam as necessary; TOAR or Approved Course.

1st Class Pilot or Mate of more than 200GRT to Mate (Pilot) of Towing Vessels - Minimum of 30 day of training & observation on route(s); exam as necessary; TOAR or Approved Course.

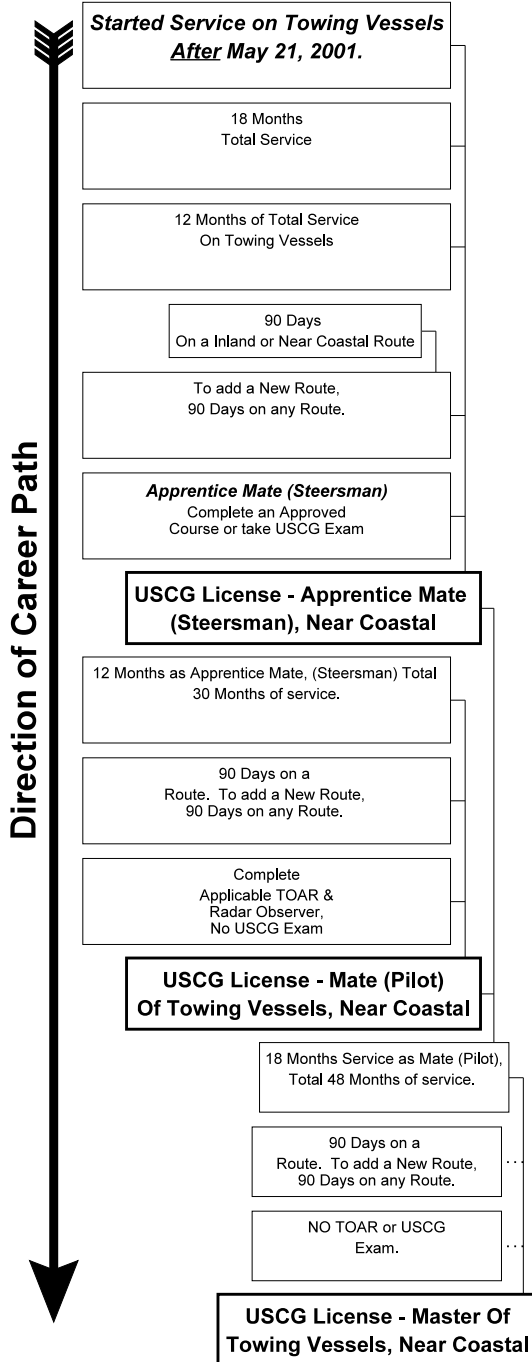
Master of more than 200GRT to Master of Towing Vessels - Minimum of 30 day of training & observation on route(s); exam as necessary; TOAR or Approved Course.

Master of 200GRT or Less to Mate (Pilot) of Towing Vessels - Proof of 36 months of service as Master under the authority of the license; minimum of 30 day of training & observation on route(s); successfully completed TOAR; complete the appropriate apprentice mate (steersman) exams or completed an approved apprentice mate (steersman) course. (Effective October 14, 2008.)

Towing Vessel Officer Inland/Near Coastal License Career Path:

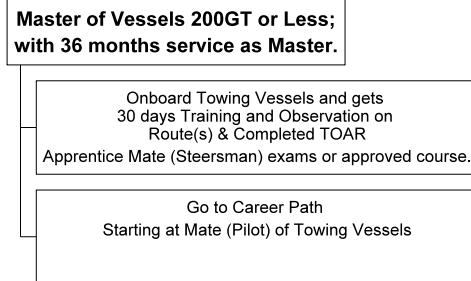
After May 21, 2006:

USCG Towing Vessel Officer Licenses:

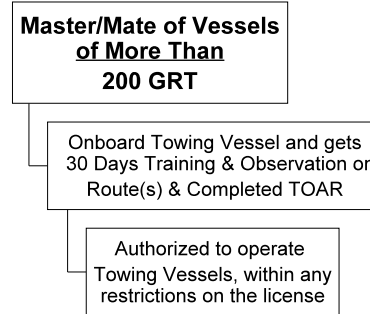


Holders of USCG Master/Mate Licenses:

Authorized to operate Towing Vessels if:



OR:



TOAR = Towing Officer Assessment Record.

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