

Areas of Refuge

Areas of refuge are used by vessels in distress, for example as safe haven for ships experiencing difficulties with inclement weather or in need of a calm harbour to make vessel repairs. In calmer seas, many of these areas also provide secure anchorage for recreational boaters.

Transport Canada (TC) is the lead agency for decisions related to a ship in need of assistance requesting a place of refuge, and works in collaboration with other agencies as appropriate. For example, TC collaborates with Fisheries and Oceans Canada with respect to pollution prevention and communications with vessels through the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG).¹

TC, supported by International Maritime Organization guidelines, does not define permanent places of refuge, because weather and sea conditions are constantly changing. Instead, vessels in need contact TC or the CCG, who advise them of appropriate locations at the time of the call.¹ This approach for identification of areas means that places of refuge cannot be appropriately mapped.

Processes have been able to map safe harbours for other purposes, however. Displayed on the accompanying map are two such initiatives, namely Towboat Reserves and the Council of British Columbia Yacht Clubs Boat Havens.¹

Towboat Reserves

Towboat reserves are set aside to provide temporary shelter for commercial marine traffic during inclement weather or when waiting for favorable tides. Towboat reserves were put in place along the BC coast to ensure that harbours of

refuge remained available for commercial marine traffic. These harbours needed to be of adequate size, located along commercial navigation routes and able to provide adequate shelter to accommodate a tug and the load being towed. Certain harbours were identified as critical harbours.²

Areas of refuge are used by vessels in distress and recreational boaters

To ensure the harbour remains available as a harbour of refuge, shoreline development is restrained and commercial traffic is provided priority anchorage. Some reserves include some shoreline development such as jetties and wharves. Reserve use is variable with some sites being used only occasionally.²

Towboat reserves do not appear on marine charts. To ensure these reserves are protected, they were mapped to provide location information to TC Navigable Waters Protection Division and TC Marine Branch for consideration during navigational reviews and decisions.²

Council of British Columbia Yacht Clubs (CBCYC) Boat Havens

The CBCYC established and published a catalogue of boat haven anchorages along the BC coast. These sites were sought to provide secure anchoring, specifically for use by small vessels for a "peaceful night." The boat havens are digitally plotted on maps used by government agencies but not all are fully protected for CBCYC's intended purpose.³

1 Transport Canada. 2007. National Places of Refuge Contingency Plan (PORCP), document TP 14707E (07/2007). www.tc.gc.ca/marinesafety/TP/TP14707/tp14707E.pdf (Accessed February 2009).
 2 Harder, S. 2007. Towboat reserves shape file metadata published on October 30. Transport Canada.
 3 Council of B.C. Yacht Clubs. N.d. Provincial boat havens. www.cbcyachtclubs.ca/boathavens.htm (Accessed February 2009).



Photo: Coral Cargill

