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## **MARINE SAFETY INFORMATION BULLETIN 04-16**

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### **Forward-Facing High Intensity LED Lights on Commercial Fishing Vessels**

Sector Northern New England has seen a significant increase in forward-facing LED lights installed on commercial fishing vessels that, in many cases, are left illuminated at all times while a vessel is underway. This emerging trend has created serious safety concerns for other mariners operating in the area, as these lights can interfere with the safe navigation of vessels. In the past, these lights were generally used to illuminate a commercial fishing vessel's aft deck for crew safety while travelling at slow speeds during hauling operations or while preparing nets or lines. The newest tendency in LED lighting is to permanently mount them facing forward in a spotlight or floodlight configuration (or sometimes both).



**Figure 1- Typical installation of forward-facing LED lights, noted with red arrows.**

Because of their intensity, LED lights mounted in this forward-facing configuration can adversely affect the night vision of mariners, and may make it difficult to see a commercial fishing vessel's navigational lights. For reference, a typical two to three mile navigational light is powered by a 1.5 watt LED bulb. In contrast, LED spotlights and floodlights can be rated up to 275 watts.

Forward-facing LED lights may also have an effect on the night vision of the mariner using it. These lights illuminate the area immediately forward of the vessel and frequently create substantial glare off the vessel and the surrounding water, compromising the crew's ability to see an approaching vessel or other hazards.



Figure 2- Forward-facing LED lights (red arrows) may obscure navigation lights (yellow).

Although these LED lights may make a vessel easier to see at great distances, improper use could constitute a violation of the International Rules for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 (72 COLGRES), if the lights:

- Obscure the navigation lights of the vessel, making it difficult to determine a vessel's heading and type of operation - **Rule 20** (impair the visibility and distinctive character of navigation lights).
- Interfere with the night vision of mariners operating in the vicinity and the keeping of a proper lookout – **Rules 5 and 20** (interfere with the keeping of a proper lookout).
- Embarrass (hinder the navigation of) another vessel – **Rule 36**

While the use of these forward-facing LED spotlights and floodlights may be helpful in certain situations, they should not be illuminated at all times while a vessel is underway and they should only be used with consideration of the existing navigation rules.

For questions regarding this Marine Safety Information Bulletin, please contact any of the Sector Northern New England Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiners listed below.

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