

24. SUBMARINE CABLES AND PIPELINES — AVOIDANCE OF AND ASSOCIATED DANGERS

Source: Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Former Notice 24/04 is cancelled. Additions and amendments to the former notice are indicated by sidelines.

1. Mariners should be aware of the need to avoid anchoring, trawling, fishing, dredging, drilling or carrying out any activity close to submarine cables and pipelines. Damage to telecommunication cables can lead to extensive disruption of international communications, whilst damage to power cables will interrupt electricity supply and could endanger life. Seabed mobility may leave a submarine cable spanning undulations and cause fishing gear to become irrecoverably snagged, putting a vessel in severe danger. Pipelines may contain flammable oil or gas under pressure; a vessel causing damage to a pipeline could face an immediate hazard either by loss of buoyancy due to gas aerated water or by fire or explosion, and result in an environmental hazard. Where it can be shown to be done wilfully or through negligence, such damage to a submarine cable or pipeline can lead to prosecution.
2. If a submarine cable is fouled whilst anchoring, fishing or trawling, every effort should be made to disengage from the cable by normal methods, without causing damage. If these efforts fail, the anchor, gear or trawl should be slipped and abandoned. Particular care should be exercised should a vessel's trawl or fishing gear foul a cable and raise it from the seabed. This may lead to a capsize situation due to the excessive load. Before any attempt to slip or cut gear from the cable is made, the cable should first be lowered to the seabed.
3. **SUBMARINE CABLES SHOULD NEVER BE CUT**, as this is likely to endanger life or cause serious injury. All power cables and most telecommunication cables carry high voltages.
4. Submarine pipelines are not always buried and their presence may effectively reduce the charted depth by as much as 2 metres. Where pipelines are close together, only one may be charted. Pipelines may span across seabed undulations; the size and positions of such spans are not constant and may vary due to tide and wave action. It is possible for fishing gear to become snagged under a pipeline so that it is irrecoverable, which could present a serious hazard to the fishing vessel. In the event that masters or skippers suspect they have fouled a pipeline with gear or anchors, they should not place excessive weight on their gear, which could damage the pipeline and endanger their vessel and crew.
5. Incidents involving the fouling of submarine cables or pipelines should be reported immediately to the appropriate authorities. In most cases this will be the nearest coastguard, who should be contacted and advised as to the nature of the problem and the position of the vessel.
6. In UK waters, owners of vessels who can prove that they have sacrificed an anchor, net or other fishing gear, to avoid damaging a submarine cable or pipeline, will receive compensation from the owner of the cable or pipeline.
7. For more information on submarine cables and pipelines, including related regulations and charting policy, refer to The Mariner's Handbook (NP 100).