



NTSB

SAFETY ALERT

National Transportation Safety Board

★ ***Tropical Cyclone Information for Mariners*** ★

How to stay up-to-date on tropical cyclones

What mariners should know:

- The National Weather Service (NWS) may issue bulletins that provide the public with updated information on tropical cyclones between the regularly scheduled advisories issued at 0300, 0900, 1500, and 2100 UTC.
- These bulletins update storm position, storm intensity, current storm movement, and minimum central pressure and may be called an “Intermediate Public Advisory,” “Tropical Cyclone Update,” or “Special Advisory.”
- With one exception, these advisories are currently not available from Inmarsat-C SafetyNET (SAT-C) or US NAVTEX broadcasts (on 518 kHz), and may not be available from US Coast Guard HF Voice or HF SITOR broadcasts.
- The NWS issues a “Tropical Cyclone Forecast/Advisory” that is available via SAT-C (but not via NAVTEX). This product contains a “next advisory” time that does not reflect when the NWS’s next Intermediate Public Advisory can be expected.
- The NTSB is not aware of any public broadcast service for mariners that provides the NWS’s “Tropical Cyclone Discussion.” This product is important because it conveys to mariners the rationale for a tropical cyclone forecast, and may describe the forecaster’s degree of confidence in the official forecast, discuss alternative scenarios, and highlight unusual hazards.
- Many tropical cyclone graphics issued by the NWS and the US Navy are not available via the NWS’s “FTPmail” service (see below).
- The NTSB has recently issued recommendations to address concerns about the content of weather forecasts and advisories and their availability to mariners.¹

¹ See *Tropical Cyclone Information for Mariners*, report number NTSB/MSR-17/02, available at www.nts.gov.

What mariners should do:

- Be sure you know what tropical cyclone forecast and advisory products are issued for the area you will be traveling through and at what times they are scheduled to be distributed.
- Verify that forecasts and advisories are available in a timely fashion from onboard weather receipt systems (such as SAT-C or radio).
- If you use a private weather vendor, make sure the vendor provides you with all available tropical cyclone advisories in a timely fashion and that you know when advisories are updated.
- **ALWAYS!** check the generation time of all received weather information to verify that you have the most recently available update.
- If you have email send/receive capabilities, learn how to use weather information sources such as the NWS's "FTPmail" service.² FTPmail can provide extremely valuable text and graphic weather information to supplement GMDSS and radio.
- Understand that GMDSS and radio provide only some of the tropical cyclone information available to mariners. Other sources such as FTPmail and the internet may make certain products (such as the National Hurricane Center's High Seas Forecast) available faster than GMDSS and radio.
- Become familiar with and use the "Tropical Cyclone Discussion" as an important source of tropical cyclone forecast information.³

Up-to-date information can save lives:

Decision-makers aboard any vessel, and their shoreside support, must be thoroughly familiar with what tropical cyclone information is available to them, through both onboard public weather receipt systems and private weather vendors. Mariners and shoreside personnel should also understand what is not available to them through normal channels, determine whether that tropical cyclone information is critical, and identify when and how to acquire it. Steps (and times) for acquiring all weather data should be posted on board for crewmembers to follow.

And again, **ALWAYS!** check the generation time of all received weather information to verify that it's the most recently available update.

² For more information on FTPmail, go to www.nws.noaa.gov/tg/ftpmail.php.

³ www.nhc.noaa.gov/aboutnhcprod.shtml#TCD.