AIS Accuracy
John Collins USCGAux SBOS ADSO-PE

The Automatic Identification System (AIS) is a valuable tool which broadcasts critical vessel information to other vessels on the waterways. However, proper function of the AIS is dependent on accurate vessel data entry, including entering the proper ship type code and the full length of a vessel and its tow. The accurate display of a vessel's full length becomes particularly important in situations that prevent vessels from seeing each other until they are in very close proximity.

The AIS carriage and operating requirements are found in [Title 33 Code of Federal Regulations 164.46](), which includes a requirement for the accurate input and upkeep of all AIS data fields. The Coast Guard Navigation Center has produced the [AIS Encoding Guide](), which provides instructions on how to populate all data fields in AIS, including steps to report the total length of the vessel and the vessel's tow. Given the wide variety of sizes and lengths of tows, and the heavy density of these types of vessels traveling on the country's marine transportation system, accurate AIS input is vital to an operator's ability to make informed navigational decisions.