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**FOR RELEASE**  
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**NOAA Office of Law Enforcement reminds mariners to slow down**

*Speed restrictions in seasonal management areas help protect right whales from ship strikes*

Starting Sunday, Nov. 15, in waters off the U.S. Southeast coast, federal regulations will require vessels 65 feet or greater to slow down in the areas where North Atlantic right whales migrate, calve and nurse, as year two of the Right Whale Ship Strike Reduction Rule goes in effect.

The speed restrictions have been in effect in waters referred to in the rule as the U.S. Mid-Atlantic since Nov. 1.

The Right Whale Ship Strike Reduction Rule restricts vessels of 65 feet or greater to speeds of 10 knots or less in seasonal management areas along the East Coast. The speed restrictions, which are based on the migration pattern of the right whale, apply in areas from Rhode Island to Brunswick, Ga., Nov. 1-April 30 and from Brunswick, Ga., to St. Augustine, Fla., Nov. 15-April 15. Maps of these areas and a compliance guide are available at [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike).

The rule is designed to reduce the chances of right whales being injured or killed by ships. Right whales, which are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, are among the most endangered whales in the world, with fewer than 400 still in existence. Their slow movements combined with time spent at the surface and near the coast make them highly vulnerable to human activities, especially being struck by ships.

"The North Atlantic right whale remains highly depleted, and ship strikes are one of the major threats," said Jim Balsiger, acting assistant administrator for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association's National Marine Fisheries Service. "We need all mariners entering U.S. ports to be aware of and adhere to these vessel speed restrictions. It is vital to the recovery of this species."

NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and U.S. Coast Guard work together to enforce the Right Whale Ship Strike Reduction Rule. Failure to comply with the rule is a violation of the ESA and MMPA, and violators can be cited and fined.

"We're alerting vessel operators of these important regulations in an effort to improve compliance and reduce collisions," said NOAA Special Agent Todd Nickerson of the New Bedford, Mass., field office. "We are trying to educate as many people as we can."

The mission of NOAA OLE is to ensure compliance with the laws and regulations enacted to conserve and protect our nation's marine resources. To report a suspected violation, including vessels greater than 65 feet going faster than 10 knots in these seasonal management areas, please call the national hotline at 1-800-853-1964.