

Recreational Boating Safety – Responsibilities Between Vessels

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The Station Galveston Flotilla of the US Coast Guard Auxiliary operates out of the USCG Station Galveston base on Galveston Island. They provide assistance to the Coast Guard by providing maritime observation patrols in Galveston Bay; by providing recreational boating vessel safety checks; and by working alongside Coast Guard members in maritime accident investigation, small boat training, watch standing, and property administration.

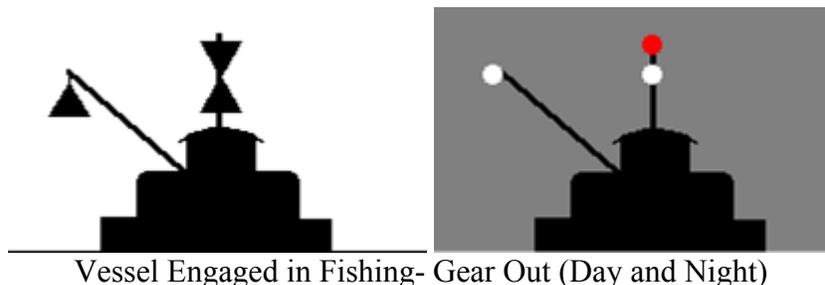
Right of Way on the Water

People who are not experienced sailors often do not fully understand the Navigational Rules of the Road that apply to vessels, so this column will be dedicated to explaining some of those rules. I have often heard people say that a sailboat always has the right of way, but as you will see below, that is not the case. The Rules do not grant privileges or rights; they impose responsibilities and require precaution under all conditions and circumstances, so it is really a misnomer to call it “right of way on the water.” It is very important to understand who has the right of way when vessels are near each other in other than a crossing, overtaking or passing situation, which we discussed last week. We call the right of way on the water the pecking order. The Navigation Rule governing the pecking order is Rule 18- Responsibilities Between Vessels.

Navigational Rule 3 – General Definitions

The following list of definitions is not complete. I have just selected a few that will help in understanding the other rules. My own comments and further explanations are in parentheses. Certain vessels are required to display dayshapes during the day and lights at night, and I will mention some of the patterns that may be used.

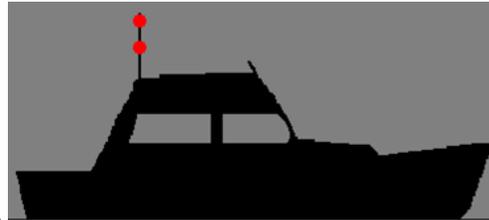
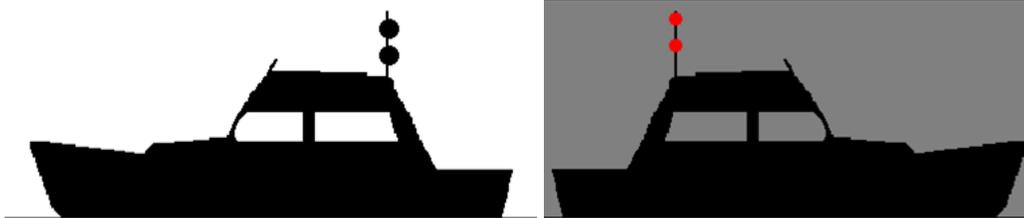
- (a) The word “**vessel**” includes every description of watercraft, including non-displacement craft, WIG craft, and seaplanes, used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water.
- (b) The term “**power-driven vessel**” means any vessel propelled by machinery.
- (c) The term “**sailing vessel**” means any vessel under sail provided that propelling machinery, if fitted, is not being used. (A sailing vessel that is using its auxiliary engine to move through the water displays a black triangle dayshape with the apex pointing down ▼).





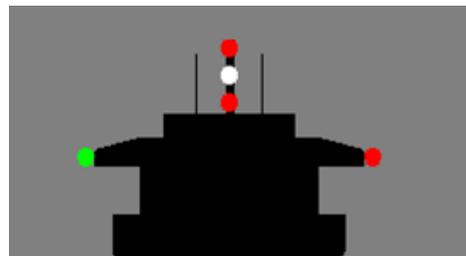
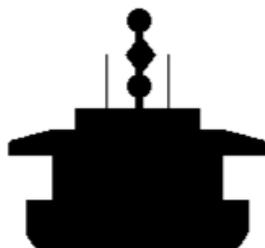
Vessel Engaged in Trawling (Day and Night)

(d) The term “**vessel engaged in fishing**” means any vessel with nets, lines, trawls or other fishing apparatus that restricts maneuverability, but does not include a vessel fishing with trolling lines or other fishing apparatus that does not restrict maneuverability. (The light displayed by trawlers is green over white- trawling at night.” The dayshape is two triangles, one over the other, with points touching. A fishing vessel with gear sticking out from either side includes a black triangle attached to the obstructing gear during the day, and a red light over a white light with an additional white light displayed on the obstructing gear. “Red over white, fishing at night.”)



Vessel Not under Command Dayshape and Lights

(f) The term “**vessel not under command**” means a vessel that through some exceptional circumstance is unable to maneuver as required by these Rules and is therefore unable to keep out of the way of another vessel. (The dayshape is two black balls, one over the other. The light pattern is two red lights, one over the other. “Red over red, the captain is dead.” The abbreviation often used for these vessels is NUC.)



Vessel Restricted in Ability to Maneuver Dayshape and Lights

(g) The term “**vessel restricted in her ability to maneuver**” means a vessel that, from the nature of her work, is restricted in her ability to maneuver as required by these Rules and is therefore unable to keep out of the way of another vessel. The term “restricted in their ability to maneuver” shall include, but not be limited to:

- (i) a vessel engaged in laying, servicing, or picking up a navigational mark, submarine cable, or pipeline;
- (ii) a vessel engaged in dredging, surveying, or underwater operations;
- (iii) a vessel engaged in replenishment or transferring persons, provisions, or cargo while underway; (yes, that means two vessels side by side while moving; ships don't stop to take on pilots)
- (iv) a vessel engaged in launching or recovery of aircraft;
- (v) a vessel engaged in mine clearance operations;
- (vi) a vessel engaged in a towing operation that severely restricts the towing vessel and her tow in their ability to deviate from their course.

(We see many of these types of vessels in our waters. Their dayshape is a ball over a diamond over a ball. The light pattern is red over white over red. Our abbreviation for such a vessel is RAM.)

The importance of identifying and classifying the vessels above will become apparent in the next rule to be discussed. The next rule is often described as The Pecking Order of Rights of Way.

Rule 18 – Responsibilities Between Vessels

Except where Rules 9 (Narrow Channels), 10 (Traffic Separation Schemes), and 13 (Overtaking) require:

- (a) A power-driven vessel shall keep out of the way of:
 - (i) a vessel not under command (NUC);
 - (ii) a vessel restricted by her ability to maneuver (RAM);
 - (iii) a vessel engaged in fishing;
 - (iv) a sailing vessel.
- (b) A sailing vessel underway shall keep out of the way of:
 - (i) a vessel not under command (NUC);
 - (ii) a vessel restricted in her ability to maneuver (RAM);
 - (iii) a vessel engaged in fishing.
- (c) A vessel engaged in fishing while underway shall, as far as possible, keep out of the way of:
 - (i) a vessel not under command (NUC);
 - (ii) a vessel restricted in her ability to maneuver (RAM).

This is not the entire rule, as it also discusses seaplanes and exotic vessels such as WIG craft (Wing in Ground craft, which are classified as boats but have the ability to fly over the surface of the water as much as 15 feet above the surface. They act like a plane but cannot reach any great altitude due to the small size of their wings.)

Rule 18 establishes a pecking order or hierarchy of responsibilities between vessels operating in close proximity. For a vessel to claim the privilege designated by Rule 18, it must meet the definition stated in Rule 3. In addition, she must display the proper dayshapes or lights so other vessels operating in the area can easily identify the entitlement claimed by that vessel. It is important to note that power-driven vessels are required to keep out of the way of all vessels except seaplanes and any vessels overtaking her. This also applies anytime a power-driven vessel is underway, not making way (drifting in the water). So, if a power-driven vessel sees a vessel approaching that is higher on the pecking order list, she is required to make way in order to stay

out of the way. For example, if you are drifting with your engine off while over the deeper barge channel in the Intracoastal Waterway, and a barge tow is seen approaching, you are required to crank up and get out of their way.

Summary

All vessels are required to follow the US Coast Guard's Navigation Rules- more commonly known to mariners as the Rules of the Road. This includes kayaks, standup paddle boards, canoes, and rowboats. The rules state which type of vessel shall keep out of the way of other types of vessels. Rule 18 states those rules in terms of the type of vessel, but the key in all situations is that all vessels share the responsibility of avoiding a collision.

For more information on boating safety, please visit the Official Website of the U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Division at www.uscgboating.org . SAFE BOATING!

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