

# International Regulations for the Prevention of Collision at Sea (IRPCS / ColRegs)



<p><b>1 Application</b> All high seas and connected waters navigable by seagoing vessels. Local authority and government rules take precedence.</p>	<p><b>2 Responsibility</b> There is no exoneration for collision. There is no right of way. Have due regard to special conditions.</p>	<p><b>3 General Definitions</b> Vessel: all craft including seaplanes, sailing, power, fishing, Not Under Command, Restricted Ability to Manoeuvre, Constrained By Draught, ACV, WIG. Underway. Restricted visibility. NB Tugs / tows.</p>
<p><b>4 Rules 5 - 10 apply in any visibility.</b></p>		
<p><b>5 Look-out</b> A good look-out must be maintained at all times by sight and hearing and by all available means, including radar if available.</p>	<p><b>6 Safe speed</b> For visibility, traffic density, manoeuvrability, background shore lights, wind, sea state, current, draught, depth, hazards, radar.</p>	<p><b>7 Risk of Collision</b> Use all available means to determine risk of collision. Constant compass bearing confirms risk. Use radar if available, with care.</p>
<p><b>8 Action to avoid collision</b> Must be positive (clear) and in ample time. Avoid crossing ahead. Consider any further danger and navigational implications.</p>	<p><b>9 Narrow Channels</b> Navigate on the starboard side of channel. Sailing or &lt; 20m must not impede vessels which can navigate safely only within the channel. Fishing shall not impede other vessels. Avoid anchoring. Sharp bends - long blast. Overtaking vessels must indicate their intention if the overtaken vessel would have to take action.</p>	<p><b>10 Traffic Separation Schemes</b> Proceed in correct direction. Keep clear of TSS and take care at terminations. Join/leave at terminations, or at as small an angle as possible. Avoid crossing or head at 90°. Use inshore zone only if cannot safely use offshore zone, or sailing or &lt; 20m. Use separation zone only in emergency or if fishing, joining or crossing. Avoid anchoring. Fishing, sailing or &lt; 20m shall not impede others.</p>
<p><b>11 Rules 12-18 only apply when in sight of other vessel.</b></p>		
<p><b>12 Sailing</b> Wind on port side gives way to wind on starboard side. Same side - vessel to windward gives way. If unsure and you have wind to port then give way.</p>	<p><b>13 Overtaking - all vessels</b> Highest priority rule. Overtaking vessel gives way. If in doubt act as if overtaking. Overtaking when initially approaching from &gt; 22.5° abaft the beam (in arc of stern light).</p>	<p><b>14 Head on - Power</b> Alter course to starboard. Make sound signal. If in doubt act. Head on - if masthead lights nearly in line or both sidelights can be seen.</p>
<p><b>15 Crossing - Power</b> Crossing power vessel gives way to power vessel on starboard side. Avoid crossing ahead.</p>	<p><b>16 Give way vessel</b> As Rule 8. Early and substantial action is required.</p>	<p><b>17 Stand on vessel</b> Shall keep course and speed but may take action if necessary and avoid collision. In a crossing situation, should generally not alter course to port.</p>
<p><b>18 Responsibilities</b> Give way order: Low - Seaplane, power, sailing, fishing, CBD, RAM, NUC - High  Only applies when underway.</p>	<p><b>19 Restricted visibility</b> (Vessels not in sight). Safe speed, engines ready. Reduce speed or stop for fog signals heard forward of the beam. Navigate with caution till danger is past. If using radar, avoid turning to port for vessels forward of the beam (unless overtaking). Avoid turning towards vessels abeam or abaft the beam.</p>	
<p><b>20 Lights and Shapes</b> Applies in all weathers. Lights to be shown from sunset to sunrise or when necessary. Shapes to be shown by day.</p>		
<p><b>21 Light Definitions</b> Masthead W 225°, sidelights G/R 112.5°, sternlights W 135°, towing light (Yellow stem), all round - 360°, flashing (120 fpm).</p>		
<p><b>22 Light Visibilities</b> Different length vessels have different minimum ranges.</p>		
<p><b>23 Power Vessel underway</b> Masthead light forward. Second masthead light to stern and higher (&lt;50m long may omit). Sidelights and sternlights. Air Cushion Vessel - 360° FI Yellow. Wing In Ground - 360° FI Red. &lt; 12m may use all round white and sidelights &lt; 7m and &lt; 7 knots may use 360° white, and sidelights if practical. &lt; 12m masthead or all round</p>		

## 24 Towing or Pushing

Towing vessel - two masthead lights if total tow length < 200m. Three mastheads if > 200m.

Rigid pushing - as power.

Pushing or alongside - two mastheads, no towing light.

Towed vessel (unless submerged) - stern and sidelights. Diamond shape if > 200m.

Pushed or alongside - sidelights plus sternlights if alongside.

Inconspicuous, partly submerged tows etc:

< 25m breadth - 360° white front and rear; > 25m breadth - additional 360° whites at extremities.

> 100m length - additional 360° white lights every 100m.

> 200m - diamond aft plus diamond forward

If sufficient cause, indicate as well as possible - illuminate tow line.

## 25 Sailing or oars - underway

Sailing - side and stern lights. May also show red/green 360° at masthead

< 20m may use tricolor instead. < 7m may have 360° white lantern.

Oars may just have lantern / torch. Motor sailing - show cone.

## 26 Fishing - Underway or at anchor:

Trawling - green / white all round - or 2 cones point to point = basket

> 50m must also show a masthead abaft and higher.

Not trawling - red / white all round - or 2 cones point to point = basket.

If gear is out > 150m - show all round white or cone in direction of gear.

Making way - show stern and sidelights (ie white 360° replaces masthead).

## 27 Other vessels

Not Under Command - 2 red all rounds - or 2 black balls.

Making way also stern and sidelights, but no masthead light.

RAM (except mine clearing) - 360° vertical red / white / red - or ball / diamond / ball vertical.

Making way - also show masthead, stern and sidelights.

Anchor - in addition.

Towing which is also RAM - as for RAM.

Dredging or underwater activities - as for RAM, plus 2 reds / balls (unsafe side) and 2 greens / diamonds (safe side).

No anchor lights required. Small vessels may use IC 'A' flag and red /white /red lights.

Mine clearance - power/anchor plus 3 green lights or 3 black balls on foremast and fore yards. Stay clear > 1000m.

< 12m: unless diving can omit signals.

## 28 Constrained by Draught

3 reds vertical  
or a cylinder

## 29 Pilot vessels on duty

360° white over 360° red, or white /  
red flag  
plus anchor light  
or if underway stern and sidelights.  
360° white replaces masthead light.

## 30 Anchored Vessels / Aground

360° white or ball. > 50m - high at fore, low at stern.  
> 100m must illuminate decks. Aground - as above,  
plus 2 reds vertical or three balls total.  
< 7m away from fairway, channels etc need not show  
signals.  
< 12m aground may act as if at anchor.

## 31 Seaplanes

Adhere to rules as closely as  
possible.

## 32 Sound Definitions

Short blast: 1 sec  
Long blast: 4 - 6 secs

## 33 Sound Equipment

>12m: whistle, >20m: +bell, >100m: +gong.  
< 12m: an efficient signal.

## 34 Manoeuvring and Warning Signals

Power underway (whistle): Starboard: ● Port: ●● Astern: ●●●. May also flash light 1 sec, > 10 secs between signals

Overtaking in channels: Starboard: ■■■● Port: ■■■●●● Agree: ■■■●■■■●

Any vessel in doubt: ●●●●● (may also use lights). Bend in channel etc ■■■■

## 35 Sounds in restricted visibility

All signals every 2 minutes underway, every minute at anchor.

Power: making way ■■■ Underway only (stopped) ■■■■ (2 secs between).

NUC, RAM, Fishing, Sailing, Tug (lame duck): ■■■●●

Towed vessel (last): ■■■●●●●

Anchor: Bell for 5 secs every minute. > 100m, bell in forepart followed by gong aft. Warning: ●■■■●

Aground: In addition to anchor: "... / ..... / ..." 3 bell, rapid bell, 3 bell. May also whistle.

Pilot Vessel: ●●●●●

< 12m: as above or sound < 2 minutes apart.

## 36 Attention

- Any other signal so as not to be mistaken or embarrass any vessel.

### Signals for Fishing Vessels in close proximity

Show these signals at lower level than normal fishing lights.

Trawling: Shooting nets: white. Hauling nets: white over red. Nets caught fast: red over red

Pair Trawling - searchlight towards pair vessel. Nets caught fast: red over red

Purse Seine - 2 Vert Flt Alt yellow every second.

### Distress Signals:

Gun; Continuous Noise; Red Rocket/Shell Stars; Morse SOS - radio, noise, light; VHF MAYDAY; Flags N over C;  
Square & Ball; Flames; Red Parachute or HH Flare; Orange Smoke; Arms Raised/Lowered; Radiotelegraph;  
Radiotelephone; EPIRB; SART.