

# Seamanship

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## What Side of the Buoys Do I Use?

One of the great mysteries of boating is “Good Lord, what side of this buoy do I go on?” While conducting a safety patrol last summer for USCG Forces, our crew came upon a skipper bringing a new boat down from Rhode Island, in Moriches Bay near the new buoyage system south of Seatuck Cove. The skipper was concerned with his 4’ draft and being able to make it to Massapequa in Great South Bay from there. We advised him that, “Tide is near flood now so stay in the channel and be careful near Nun-18. It has been moved to the north due to shoaling in the original channel. Forget what your GPS says. Use your eyes.” Naturally, he took the buoy on the wrong side and was grounded for a number of hours. So, let’s re-address this now and forever! Here we go...

### Reality TV – You’ve Won!

Imagine this. You are on one of those reality TV shows and you have won! In addition to the big job and the big bucks, the host throws in a beautiful penthouse apartment in a brand new 50-story condo overlooking the marina and harbor. You get so excited that you faint straightaway. You wake up in the elevator and you see the elevator numbers flashing by.

If the numbers were going up, would you be leaving the building or returning to our new home in the penthouse? If the numbers were going down, would you be returning to your new home in the penthouse or leaving to go to work? Clearly, if the numbers are going up, you are going up - returning home. If the numbers are going down, you are head-

ing for the street level - leaving.

And the same is true of the buoyage system in the entire United States. While certain pearls of wisdom work in local waters (“keep the reds and the ocean on the same of your boat”), they don’t work everywhere and they also fail to educate you as a mariner as to how the system works and why.

Of course, many of us have heard and used the old saw of “red, right, return” – meaning when returning from sea to your harbor/home, keep the red buoys on your right. But, per my war story above, when you leave Seatuck Cove to starboard, you are entering Tuthill Cove almost immediately. Are you returning to Tuthill or leaving Seatuck? So, let’s extend the old saw and get it right forever more.

### Red - Right, Return; Left, Leaving

Keep the **Red** buoys on your **Right** when **Re**turning and on your **Left** when **Le**aving. If the numbers are going up, you are returning (to your penthouse in the sky!). If the numbers are going down, you are leaving (to that great job you just won!).

Be wary of one thing – “discontinuous numbers”, meaning big jumps between buoy numbers or the numbers starting to go the opposite way. This means you have entered a new seaway or road and you need to recalibrate the direction of the numbers. For example, if returning from sea via the Moriches Inlet and heading through the West Cut towards Forge River, you will see the following - red-4W (to

starboard), red-6W (to starboard – see the #s are going up) and green-7W to port. Then you will see green-MOR-15. That is a big jump! If you were in the same channel, you should be seeing #8 or #9 – not #15!

Now, what side? Quickly checking your chart, you will see that red-MOR-14 is about 1,000 yards ahead. The buoy numbers are now going down! You are in a new seaway that says, despite the fact that you are heading back to your slip up the Forge River, you are leaving as far as the buoyage system is concerned! Take green-MOR-15 to starboard (so that you can take red-MOR-14 to port). **Left Leaving!** Never fails (in North America).

Want to know why our reds are on our right when returning from sea and not the other way around as in Europe? Well, when we were at war with the mightiest navy in the world 236+ years ago, the revolutionaries turned all the buoys around so that the English men-of-war would run aground... and we just kept them that way ever since!

**“Red - Right, Return; Left, Leaving.”** If the numbers are going up, you are returning as far as the rules of the road are concerned... always.

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at [JoinUSCGAux@aol.com](mailto:JoinUSCGAux@aol.com) or go direct to the DISR Human Resources department, who are in charge of new members matters, at [DSO-HR](#) and we will help you “get in this thing...”