



Prevention of Collision At Sea – I Can't See – Now What!?

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You may remember that, right around this time last year (see SSP, "Stuck in the Fog – Now What", 10/25/06), we wrote about boat handling in foggy conditions. Why is that? Well, has anybody noticed how thick the fog has been several times in here? Air gets cool, water stays warm... Fog... and gobs of it for hours on end... Last year's column was more "anecdotal seamanship" but, within our series on the COLREGs, this one is more scholarly. In short, if there isn't a Rule for it, it doesn't exist!

Rule 19 – Conduct of Vessels in Restricted Visibility

First, does "restricted visibility" mean fog? No. It means "restricted visibility" – rain, darkness, fog, snow, smoke, heavy seas (like when you are down in troughs and can't see anything but the sea...)

What does Rule 19 cover? Specifically, this governs how vessels that can't see each other act. If you can see each other, even in the fog, all the prior rules we have discussed rise to the top... Further, it states that (like a car), "Every vessel shall proceed at a safe speed adapted to the prevailing circumstances and conditions of restricted visibility." It goes on to add that "a power-driven vessel shall have her engines ready for immediate maneuver." Remember with respect to the language of the Rules – "shall" means "must."

Be aware that this injunction about having your engines ever at the ready has more than a bit of "having your cake and eating it too" with respect to an Admiralty or Maritime Board... For example...

1. If you are traveling at speeds consistent with "nor-

mal" visibility within sight of an area of restricted visibility, i.e., a fog bank, you can be judged to have been speeding as if you were in the fog bank! Why? Because you can't see a boat coming out of it and she can't see you – until it is too late.

2. A vessel which detects "by radar alone" the presence of another vessel shall determine if a close quarters condition is developing and/or a risk of collision exists. (Remember, if you have radar and you don't turn it on, you are already breaking the Rules since you are obligated to use "all available means" for navigation and safety.) If a risk of collision exists, "she shall take avoiding-action in ample time" ... but don't...

a. turn to port if you believe a vessel is ahead of your beam (midships), unless you are overtaking that vessel;

b. turn towards the vessel on your beam or abaft (behind) you...

c. unless you can't avoid it!

3. If you believe a risk of collision exists, "every vessel which hears apparently forward of her beam the fog signal of another vessel shall (must!) reduce her speed to the minimum at which she can be kept on course. She shall (must!) if necessary take all way off and, in any event, navigate with extreme caution until the danger of collision is over."

4. ...but be ready and "have her engines ready for im-

mediate maneuver!"

Admittedly, this Rule is hard to follow in that "safe speed" has been judged repeatedly by Maritime Boards as "allow stopping in half the distance of visibility." There have been some days of late where visibility didn't extend to the bow! Further, many a mariner (including this one) has turned off his engine to increase his ability to hear. Perhaps now with 4-strokes being so much quieter, this conundrum can be avoided.

In short, unless you are dead sure that there is no risk of collision, assume there is a risk. If a collision occurs, that is prima facie evidence that a risk did exist! Assuming there is a risk, your first and best step is to slow to bare steerage – and then get on that horn.

Here is also one last idea and it is not in the Rules and in fact goes against 2(b) above (Rule 19-d-ii, in the COLREGs) but it goes back to time immemorial. If you hear a boat ahead of you, before you take all way off, do this.

Turn into her. Your bow presents a smaller target than your beam and the bow is your least vulnerable point. It is nearly impossible for her bow to plow into your boat through your bow. They will "glance off" each other.

You won't find that in any Rule book but it may go back as far as the Phoenicians...

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at USCGAUX2007@aol.com or go direct to MaryJo Cruickshank, who is in charge of new members matters, at FSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing..."

Moriches Inlet September 2007					
Day	High	Low	High	Low	High
Sat 1		4:05 AM / -0.24ft	10:31 AM / 3.60ft	4:46 PM / 0.03ft	10:58 PM / 3.12ft
Sun 2		4:51 AM / -0.06ft	11:26 AM / 3.53ft	5:44 PM / 0.20ft	11:57 PM / 2.92ft
Mon 3		5:43 AM / 0.16ft	12:24 PM / 3.42ft	6:52 PM / 0.36ft	
Tue 4	12:59 AM / 2.75ft	6:48 AM / 0.36ft	1:25 PM / 3.31ft	8:06 PM / 0.43ft	
Wed 5	2:02 AM / 2.64ft	8:02 AM / 0.47ft	2:28 PM / 3.22ft	9:15 PM / 0.39ft	
Thu 6	3:09 AM / 2.62ft	9:12 AM / 0.46ft	3:35 PM / 3.19ft	10:15 PM / 0.30ft	
Fri 7	4:16 AM / 2.69ft	10:13 AM / 0.39ft	4:39 PM / 3.24ft	11:07 PM / 0.18ft	
Sat 8	5:16 AM / 2.84ft	11:07 AM / 0.30ft	5:34 PM / 3.31ft	11:54 PM / 0.09ft	
Sun 9	6:07 AM / 3.01ft	11:57 AM / 0.22ft	6:21 PM / 3.37ft		
Mon 10		12:38 AM / 0.01ft	6:51 AM / 3.16ft	12:44 PM / 0.16ft	7:03 PM / 3.39ft
Tue 11		1:18 AM / -0.02ft	7:32 AM / 3.25ft	1:28 PM / 0.13ft	7:41 PM / 3.34ft
Wed 12		1:55 AM / -0.01ft	8:10 AM / 3.29ft	2:09 PM / 0.14ft	8:18 PM / 3.24ft
Thu 13		2:30 AM / 0.04 ft	8:46 AM / 3.28 ft	2:48 PM / 0.19 ft	8:55 PM / 3.09 ft
Fri 14		3:02 AM / 0.14 ft	9:23 AM / 3.22 ft	3:26 PM / 0.27 ft	9:32 PM / 2.91 ft
Sat 15		3:33 AM / 0.27 ft	9:59 AM / 3.13 ft	4:03 PM / 0.38 ft	10:11 PM / 2.72 ft
Sun 16		4:03 AM / 0.42 ft	10:37 AM / 3.03 ft	4:41 PM / 0.52 ft	10:52 PM / 2.55 ft
Mon 17		4:32 AM / 0.57 ft	11:18 AM / 2.93 ft	5:23 PM / 0.66 ft	11:38 PM / 2.41 ft
Tue 18		5:06 AM / 0.71 ft	12:04 PM / 2.86 ft	6:17 PM / 0.78 ft	
Wed 19	12:30 AM / 2.31 ft	5:53 AM / 0.83 ft	12:55 PM / 2.83 ft	7:28 PM / 0.82 ft	
Thu 20	1:27 AM / 2.28 ft	7:12 AM / 0.89 ft	1:52 PM / 2.84 ft	8:37 PM / 0.74 ft	
Fri 21	2:28 AM / 2.33 ft	8:35 AM / 0.81 ft	2:53 PM / 2.93 ft	9:35 PM / 0.57 ft	
Sat 22	3:32 AM / 2.47 ft	9:39 AM / 0.63 ft	3:55 PM / 3.07 ft	10:25 PM / 0.34 ft	
Sun 23	4:31 AM / 2.71 ft	10:34 AM / 0.40 ft	4:52 PM / 3.27 ft	11:12 PM / 0.11 ft	
Mon 24	5:24 AM / 3.02 ft	11:26 AM / 0.17 ft	5:43 PM / 3.45 ft	11:57 PM / -0.11 ft	
Tue 25	6:12 AM / 3.34 ft	12:17 PM / -0.04 ft	6:31 PM / 3.59 ft		
Wed 26		12:42 AM / -0.28 ft	6:56 AM / 3.62 ft	1:09 PM / -0.21 ft	7:17 PM / 3.64 ft
Thu 27		1:26 AM / -0.38 ft	7:40 AM / 3.81 ft	1:59 PM / -0.31 ft	8:03 PM / 3.59 ft
Fri 28		2:11 AM / -0.41 ft	8:26 AM / 3.90 ft	2:49 PM / -0.33 ft	8:52 PM / 3.46 ft
Sat 29		2:56 AM / -0.34 ft	9:14 AM / 3.88 ft	3:39 PM / -0.25 ft	9:45 PM / 3.26 ft
Sun 30		3:42 AM / -0.19 ft	10:07 AM / 3.75 ft	4:32 PM / -0.08 ft	10:44 PM / 3.04 ft

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 Wednesday 3:00 to 8:00 • Thursday 8:30 to 3:00
 Friday 8:30 to 3:00 • Saturday 8:00 to 4:00

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