

From the Captain of the Port

Speed, Baby, Speed – What is Safe?

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If you've done any amount of boating in this area, you've undoubtedly experienced another boat overtaking you at such a speed that you grumbled, "What is that moron thinking?!" Without any ambiguity, Rule 6 of the U.S. Coast Guard's Rules of Navigation — Safe Speed — is all about determining what is a safe speed, condition by condition.

What is "Safe Speed"?

According to Rule 6, "Every vessel shall (must!) at all time proceed at a safe speed so that she can take proper and effective action to avoid collision and be stopped within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions." Admiralty and maritime boards consistently applied the rule so that a safe stopping distance means operating at a speed that allows you to stop in half the distance that you can see ahead. So, was that guy that blew by you at 40 knots when visibility was to the horizon traveling at a safe speed? Unlikely. Read on.

Rule 6 also defines factors "that shall (i.e., must!) be among those taken into account" by all vessels.

6(a)(i) The state of visibility (OK, to the horizon covers Mr. Speedy here)

(ii) Traffic density (Maybe you were the only other boat in sight)

(iii) Maneuverability (hmm, can turn on a dime... maybe still OK...)

(iv) At night, background (broad daylight...still OK lighting)

(v) Sea and weather (beautiful day...still OK...hmm!)

(vi) Draft versus water (BINGO! No way high speeds can be justified when any small deviation from the channel will ground you at any moment.)



Pictured at Sector Long Island Sound's Change of Command ceremony are (l - r) Captain Joseph Vojvodich, the new Sector Long Island Sound Commander, Rear Admiral Daniel Neptun the First District Commander, and Captain Daniel Ronan, the former Sector Long Island Sound Commander.

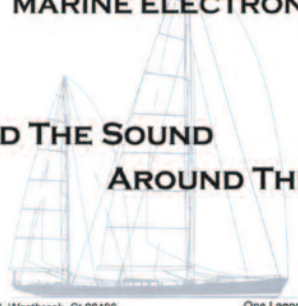
And we all know that even channels can silt over after a storm or heavy sea state.

Even though the courts have applied the abovementioned rule of thumb of "safe speed equals safe stopping in half the range of visibility," this fails when the hazard is below the surface. Visibility on the night of April 14, 1912 was excellent when Sixth Officer James Paul Moody shouted, "Iceberg Ahead!"

With or without alcohol present, breaking Rule 6 can have lifetime consequences. After losing 46 souls when the T/N *Andrea Doria* collided in the fog with the M/V *Stockholm* on July 25, 1956, the *Andrea Doria's* captain was heard to mutter, "When I was a boy, and all my life, I loved the sea; now I hate it."

By the way, 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." ♦

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