



From the Captain of the Port

Prevention of Collision at Sea – Let's NOT Take a Meeting!

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When someone says, "Let's take a meeting!" it should make you cringe at the use of an ultra-swank LA colloquialism in our North-east culture. If they say it on the water, do as Nancy Reagan once advised – Just say NO! A "meeting" on the water can generally be bad.

Overtaking, Head-On & Crossing

There are only three types of vessel meeting situations on water – head-on, crossing or overtaking (see *WindCheck*, "Prevention of Collision at Sea – Playing By The Rules", June 2010.) The Rules explain how skippers are to interact with each other via vessel maneuvers and sound (or radio) signals. Although we've written about this subject here before, it's time to devote more time and understanding to these critical Rules.

Rule 13 - Overtaking

Lucky 13 essentially says that if you are coming up on a vessel, the responsibility is yours to stay out of the way of that vessel. Here are three ways to judge whether you are overtaking or not:

At night, if you can see a white light and no red or green side lights that could mean you are overtaking. The white light is either an anchor light or the stern light. There is an angle of arc (135-degrees) that sweeps from one side of the vessel around to the stern and back to the corresponding point on the opposite side of the boat within which, by USCG regulation, you must only be able see the stern light.

During the day, if you see an uninterrupted wake from one side of the boat to the other, you are overtaking her. When in doubt, assume you are the overtaking vessel and act accordingly. Even a sailboat is the give-way boat if it is overtaking you.

And while you are at it, why not radio ahead that you want to pass the stand-on vessel on her starboard side ("on one whistle, skipper") or port side ("on two whistles, skipper")? Use what you have to reduce the surprises out there. By the way, you **cannot** turn an overtaking situation into a crossing situation by speeding ahead, turning to port and then cutting across the overtaken vessel's starboard bow. You must be so far ahead when you make that turn that you're well out of the way of the boat you passed.

Rule 14 – Dead Ahead!

When two vessels are on reciprocal (opposite) courses, obviously this is a problem. There are three ways to determine if you are "head-on."

At night, if you see three lights – red, green with a white light above them, you are definitely heading straight at someone who is

heading straight at you.

During the day, if you see an interrupted wake in the middle of the boat's aspect, you are very likely heading right at each other. That break is the bow cutting through the water.

When in doubt, assume you are on reciprocal courses and act accordingly.

In this situation, both vessels are "give-way" and both are required, where conditions permit, to turn to starboard and open up a passing lane between them. Remember – take "early and substantial" action so that your maneuver is "telegraphed" to the other skipper. The point, again, is to reduce surprises.

Rule 15 – Crossing

When two vessels appear to be heading across each other's paths, this is a crossing situation. There are three ways to determine if a collision is imminent.

At night, if you see a red light with a white light above it and trailing behind, you are on crossing courses and she is the stand-on vessel. You are thus the give-way. If you see a green and a white light above it and trailing behind, you have a crossing situation where you are the stand-on vessel – but keep an eye on her always! You don't want to be "dead right!" During the day, you can obviously see if the vessel is crossing your path on your starboard side (you are give-way) or on your port side (you are stand-on).

Mark the other boat's progress against something fixed on your boat – a cleat, a stanchion, the anchor – anything that is traveling with you. If the opposing boat continues to hover on or around that fixed mark as you both continue your course and speed, a collision is about to happen!

When in doubt, assume you are on a collision course and act accordingly. In this situation, the give-way vessel is to turn to starboard (towards the stand-on boat) and go behind her (go "under her stern"). Remember – take "early and substantial" action so that your maneuver is "telegraphed" to the other skipper.

But what if you see that you cannot turn to starboard because of (1) traffic conditions, (2) rocks, (3) shallows, etc.? Rule 15 clearly says that the give-way vessel "shall avoid crossing ahead of the other vessel" (i.e., do not speed up and try to cross ahead!) Just slow down or even stop! Let the approaching vessel pass ahead of you, just as you would allow a sailboat to pass ahead.

None of these meeting situations absolve a skipper from taking action to avoid collision. Whether you are give-way or stand-on, you are required to take actions to keep clear when it becomes apparent that the actions of the other boater is not enough...But this is a whole other rule!

If you're interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2010@aol.com or John Blevins, who is in charge of new members matters, at FSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing." ♦