



From the Captain of the Port

Some More Rules to Live By

By Vincent Pica

District Chief of Staff, First District Southern Region
United States Coast Guard Auxiliary

With the official End O' Summer behind us, we can use this period to cover Rules that might not warrant a full column by themselves. It's hard to find topics more important than the COLREGs, so let's be sure we cover them all!

Rule 10 – Traffic Separation Schemes

In highly trafficked waters, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopts traffic separation schemes (TSS) which are “lanes” for in-bound and out-bound commercial vessels to use. Like our asphalt roads, these roads also have a “median divider” to separate the in-bound from the out-bound lanes. You can find them in magenta on your charts. Take a look at the Ambrose Channel coming out of New York/Newark on your charts.



Guess what? All vessels in-bound or out-bound to the designated harbors “shall” (means: must) use them. They are directed to enter and exit them at the two terminuses or, if not practical, to enter or leave them at as small an angle as practicable. If such vessels need to cross the TSS, they shall do so at as close to a right angle as is practical, i.e., get across as quickly as possible, subject to the COLREGs. All COLREGs apply within the TSS. Guess what else? You are most likely exempt as sailboats, motored vessels less than 20 meters (~60 feet) and boats engaged in fishing with nets or lines... So, why bother?

1. If fishing (and they mean commercial fishing boats, not guys with Penn reels and a Grady White), the vessel must move in the general direction of traffic AND not impede the passage of any other boat using the lane. This has implications for Rule 18, and the priority of vessels in various rungs of the “pecking order.”

2. If fishing with nets near a TSS (or in a TSS for that matter), the vessel's nets cannot extend into the TSS and impede the traffic of any other boat using the lane.
3. You need to know what the other skipper is thinking about and acting on, especially when near the behemoths that traffic in the TSS's...

Rule 12 – Sailing Vessels

Since sailboats can't sail into the wind, there are special rules that guide us and them as to priorities and protocols. But what about sailboat vs. sailboat? Rule 12 rules as follows. First, the vessel with the wind on her port side shall keep out of the way of the other, i.e., if the windward side (which by convention and most cases is the side opposite to that which the mainsail is on) is your port side, you are the give-way. Second, if both sailboats have their mainsail trimmed to the starboard side (opposite the wind and thus both boats have the wind on their port side), the boat furthest upwind is the give-way vessel. In fact, in all conditions, if both sailboats have the wind on the same side (i.e., even starboard), the boat furthest upwind is the give-way vessel.

What about conflicting or overriding Rules? There is only one – Rule 13 (Overtaking) overrules Rule 12 when one sailboat is overtaking the other, i.e., from more than 22.5o abaft (behind) the beam. Then, the overtaking sailboat, regardless of where the wind is from, is the give-way vessel.

Rule 38 - Exemptions

If there are Rules, there are exemptions. You've seen that already in a number of the columns, including this one (re: Rule 10 above). Rule 38 basically says that any boat whose keel was laid before a particular version of the Rules went into force is exempt with respect to the Rule 22 for a specified number of years before they must retrofit to the Rules. The exemptions run from 4 to 9 years – except (an exemption to the exemption!) vessels of less than 20 meters (~60 feet) are permanently exempt! In short, our boats can keep whatever USCG standards there were at the time her keel was laid.

If you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux@aol.com or go direct to the D1SR Human Resources department, who are in charge of new members matters, and we will help you “get in this thing.”

Captain Joe Vojvodich is the Captain of the Port and Sector Commander for US Coast Guard Sector Long Island Sound. Captain Vojvodich is responsible for all active-duty, reservist and auxiliary Coast Guard personnel within the Sector. Vin Pica, Chief of Staff for the First District Southern Region in the US Coast Guard Auxiliary, works closely with Captain Vojvodich and his staff to promote boating safety in the waters between Connecticut, Long Island and 200 nautical miles offshore. Sector Long Island Sound Command Center can be reached 24 hours a day at 203-468-4401. ♦