

Prevention of Collision at Sea

The Christmas Tree of Lights

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As we've delved deeper into the Rules as they pertain to "Lights and Shapes", I have laid the ground work for this next set of Rules, which is considerably more "intense" in the application of these so-called "Lights and Shapes." Why? Because they have to do primarily with commerce over the open seas where the life blood of the U.S. and the world economies still flows. Despite our high-tech economy and the reliance on the airline industry for transport, the OECD reports that 90% of the world's goods are still transported by sea. This being the case, we had better understand what we are signaling to each other – with our Lights and Shapes...

What We Are Going to Focus On

In this column and the ones ahead, we will focus on the primary commercial applications of the Rules:

Rule 26: Fishing Vessels (and I don't mean you and your 26' Grady...)

Rule 27: Vessels Not Under Command – NUCs – and Those Restricted In Their Ability to Maneuver – RAMs

Rule 28: Vessels Constrained by their Draft (and I don't mean by buoy 26!)

Rule 29: Pilots – Who brings the leviathans into a crowded harbor?

Rule 30: Anchored and Aground

Rule 31: Seaplanes

What Does Rule 26 Say?

A lot – and a fishing vessel, as it pertains to Rule 26, is a vessel trawling or fishing by means of dragging through the water nets, dredges, lines or "other apparatus used as a fishing appliance." They don't mean us, drifting with the wind and a Penn reel in our hand.

The lights on a commercial fishing vessel are just the same as any vessel as described in Rule 21 (see "Lights! Camera! Action!" *Long Island Boating World*, January 2011). If she is underway, she shall exhibit side lights of red and green, white masthead light and white stern light. If at anchor, she shall exhibit lights associated with that condition (no running or side lights!) In addition to all those responsibilities, she is

charged with two important additions: "Green over white, we be shrimping tonight" or "Red over white, we be fishing tonight." What does this mean?

We Be Shrimping Tonight

If the commercial vessel is pulling a dredge or nets astern, she will exhibit the green and white light configuration. Don't get in behind her since she may be pulling lines for miles astern.

If she is greater than 50 meters, her mast light must be above the green light so she'll show "white over green over white." As with all commercial fishing vessels, she must exhibit the "shape consisting of two cones with their apexes together in a vertical line one above the other."

We Be Fishing Tonight

If the commercial vessel has fishing gear extended abeam, she will exhibit the red and white light configuration. Also, if the gear extends more than 150 meters horizontally from the vessel, she shall show a white light and "cone apex upwards" in the direction of the gear. Like the "shrimper", if she is greater than 50 meters, her mast light must be above the red light so she'll show "white over red over white." As with all commercial fishing vessels, she must exhibit the "shape consisting of two cones with their apexes together in a vertical line one above the other."

What Does Rule 27 Say?

Rule 27 is about vessels "not under command" (NUCs) – meaning that the captain cannot control the vessel for whatever reason. The rudder may be jammed over (going in circles), catastrophic failure of hydraulic steering system, total failure of braking system (just kidding!), etc. Rule 27 also refers to vessels "restricted in their ability to maneuver" (RAMs) by the nature of her work. What does that mean? The Rules specifically mentions "severely restricted" by towing, dredging or other "underwater operations" or "mine clearance" operations as examples. What should you do? Stay well clear. NUCs and RAMs are the very highest of the "pecking" order of priority.

Red Over Red – The Captain is Dead

How do you know that a vessel is a "NUC?" The Shape is two balls in a vertical line and the Light signal that the vessel must display is two red "all-around" lights in a vertical line "where they can best be seen." "Red over red – the captain is dead" means the vessel cannot be controlled via any helm control. Perhaps the most famous "NUC" was the German battleship *Bismarck*. On her first and final mission, late in May 1941, after she sank the *HMS Hood* with a single shot into the *Hood's* main magazine (causing the *Hood* to break in two in an enormous fire ball and sink with her 1,415 crew and Admiral Holland in under two minutes), Sir Winston Churchill gave the famous command "Sink the *Bismarck*!" On May 26, after three days of sea battles, maneuvers, feints and lucky breaks, a British "Swordfish" torpedo plane put a torpedo into the *Bismarck's* rudder, jamming it. She now was forced to steam in a circle, unable to escape. Since the *Bismarck* refused to raise a flag of surrender, the British Navy took its revenge the next morning on the *Bismarck*, her 2,100 man crew and Captain Lindemann. Truly, red over red...

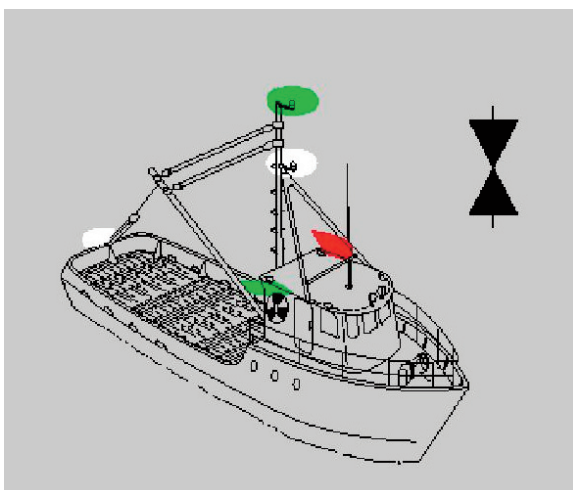
Restricted In Her Ability to Maneuver – By the Nature of Her Work

Tow boats have the burden of declaring that they are "severely restricted" by raising the Shape (ball, diamond, ball) and Lights (red over white over red) to declare herself a "RAM." Does that mean that Sea Tow bringing in a 30'er with a fouled prop is a RAM? In the strictest definition, unlikely. Should you give her a wide berth and pass her "on a slow bell" (minimum speed needed for you to maintain steerage)? Of course. But a RAM in this regard most likely will involve a towed vessel of considerable windage and leeway with a tug (or two) doing the necessary labors. Why? Mostly because there is no way to stop the entourage in any reasonable distance or otherwise take action with respect to Rules 13-15 (overtaking, head-to-head, or crossing situations – see "Let's Take a Meeting – NOT!", LIBW, September 2010.) Other classes of RAMs are dredgers (which must also show two balls/two red lights on the side of any equipment out-boarded abeam) or a mine-clearer. A mine-clearer (thankfully unheard of in these waters!) will show three balls in a line as her Shape and three green lights in a row as her Light.

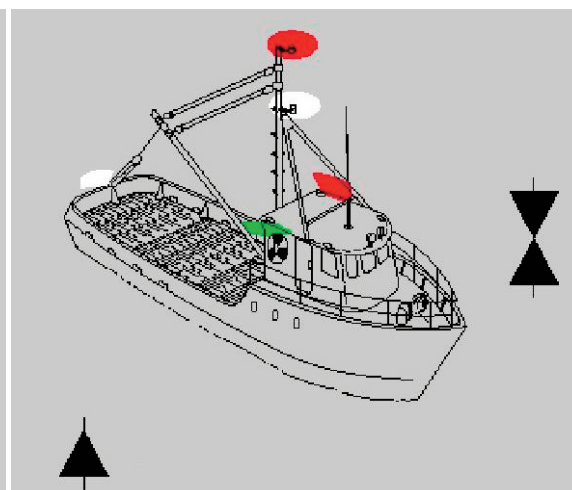
How about a 1,000 ft leviathan full of Chevy's for Brazilians steaming out towards the Canyons from Port Newark. Well, if she had to stop for you, remember this: From her cruising speed, her skipper can throw all the engines into "full power, astern" and she'll stop in about 5 sea miles.

Lots of lights, complex shapes = stay away, Bunky!

BTW, 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, at DSO-HR and we will help you "get in this thing..."



Green over White, We Be Shrimping Tonight - courtesy USCG Rules of Navigation.



Red over White, We Be Fishing Tonight - courtesy USCG Rules of Navigation.