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[Prevention of Collision at Sea – The Christmas Tree of Lights](#)

As we've delved deeper into the Rules as they pertain to "Lights and Shapes," I've laid the groundwork for this next set of Rules, which are considerably more "intense" in their application. This column will focus on the primary commercial applications of the Rules:

**Rule 26: Fishing Vessels**

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

**What Does Rule 26 Say?**

A lot – and a fishing vessel as it pertains to Rule 26 is one trawling or fishing by means of dragging through the water nets, dredges, lines or "other apparatus used as a fishing appliance."

The lights on a commercial fishing vessel are the same as any vessel as described in Rule 21. If she's underway, she shall exhibit sidelights 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 Shrimpin' Tonight" or "Red over White, We Be Fishin' Tonight." What does that mean?

**We Be Shrimpin' 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, as she may be pulling lines for miles astern. If she's 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 Fishin' Tonight**

If the commercial vessel has fishing gear extended abeam, she'll exhibit the red and white light configuration. Also, if the gear is extending 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's greater than 50 meters, her mast light must be above the red light so she'll show "white over red over white."

## 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. Rule 27 also refers to vessels “restricted in their ability to maneuver (RAMs)” by the nature of their work. The Rule specifically mentions “severely restricted” by towing, dredging or other “underwater operations” or “mine clearance” operations. Stay well clear and by – 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” meaning 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 in 1941, after she sank the HMS Hood with a single shot into the Hood’s main magazine (breaking her in two and sinking her with 1,415 crew in under two minutes), Sir Winston Churchill gave the famous command: “Sink the Bismarck!” On May 26, a British “Swordfish” torpedo plane put a torpedo into the Bismarck’s rudder, jamming it. She was forced to steam in a circle, unable to escape. The Bismarck refused to raise a flag of surrender, and the British Navy took its revenge on her, 2,100 German sailors and Captain Lindemann. Truly, red over red...

## Restricted In Her Ability to Manuever – By the Nature of Her Work

A tow boat must declare that she is “severely restricted” by raising the Shape (Ball, Diamond, Ball) and Lights (Red over White over Red) to declare herself a “RAM.” A RAM 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.

How about a 1,000-foot leviathan steaming out from Port Newark? If she had to stop for you from her cruising speed, her skipper can throw all the engines into “full power, astern.” And she’ll stop – in about five sea miles. Lots of lights, complex shapes = stay away, Bunky! 7

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