

# Prevention of Collision at Sea - Break All the Rules!

Vincent Pica - District Captain, Sector Long Island Sound/South, D1-SR  
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You may remember saying to your parents, "but the other kids were doing it!" It didn't work then – and it won't work in front of an Admiralty or Maritime Board either. But, this time you will be looking for an excuse for following the rules – when you should have broken them!

## Time to Take Responsibility!

The COLREGs are dominated by Rule 2 – which essentially provides not just a free pass for breaking all the rules but a **requirement** that you do if the failure to do so will cause a collision at sea! What does it actually say?

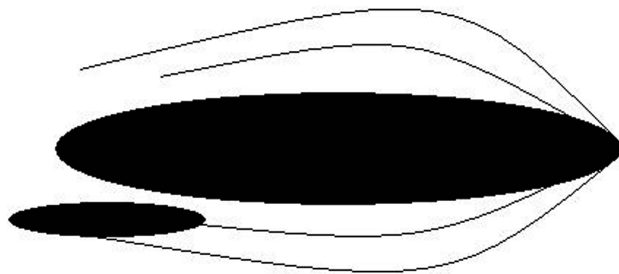
## Rule 2 - Responsibility

(a) Nothing in these rules shall exonerate any vessel, or the owner, master, or crew thereof, from the consequences of any neglect to comply with these Rules or of the neglect of any precaution which may be required by the ordinary practice of seamen, or by the special circumstances of the case.

(b) In construing and complying with these Rules due regard shall be had to all dangers of navigation and collision and to any special circumstances, including the limitations of the vessels involved, **which may make a departure from these Rules necessary to avoid immediate danger.**

Take a close look at 2(b) (emphasis

mine). As I said, it is not just a free pass for breaking all the rules but a requirement that we do so. It essentially makes 2(b) the most important rule since it trumps all other rules. It removes any argument that a participant in a collision is without fault since it obligates the vessel's master – or crew – to do everything possible to avoid a collision at sea. Note also that it speaks to the "limitations of the vessels involved" in the calculus of deciding whether to follow the rules or to break



them.

How do you know when to or what would be reasons to do so? What if "coming to starboard and going under the stern of a vessel crossing from your starboard side" would put you

onto rocks or into the shallows? Does that mean it is OK to speed up and pass ahead? I wouldn't – ever! Just stop and let the skipper behind you deal with the new situation. Go back and look at last month's column for a bit more information on Rules 13 and 15, which this point is about. (<http://www.atlanticmaritimeacademy.com/images/LIBW-1003-colreg-start.pdf>).

What about a circumstance when you are the stand-on vessel and another skipper on your port side has not indicated in any way that he recognizes that he is about to cross ahead of you? Should you speed ahead to ensure he passes behind you? I wouldn't – ever! You can stop, or if that is impossible under the circumstances, at least slow or even turn to starboard and try to run parallel to the offending skipper.

## Sucked In!

Under these circumstances and if the offending skipper is driving a "battle wagon" of a boat, be very wary of a little understood hydrodynamic effect of running parallel to a large vessel – suction!

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The combination of the wide bow wave of the larger vessel, which spreads out from the bow and then collapses back towards the stern of the vessel, and his prop wash can draw you right into her. And you will look like the over-taking vessel.

If you think this is too far-fetched, there is a famous naval collision that speaks directly to this circumstance. It happened on September 20, 1911 and it involved the 882-foot ocean liner *RMS Olympic* and the 360-foot British man-o'-war *HMS Hawke* near the Isle of Wight.

*Hawke* saw *Olympic* on her port side not reacting to signals and whistles, so *Hawke* put the helm over hard to starboard to attempt to run parallel. Within seconds, the suction effect of the far larger *RMS Olympic* pulled the *HMS Hawke* into her. An official Board of Inquiry eventually found largely against *Olympic* but White Star, the owner of the *RMS Olympic*, countered that *Hawke* was at fault as the over-taking vessel and steered directly into her. After many scientific experiments using the technology of the day, *Hawke* withstood the challenge based on the suction effect of the *RMS Olympic*. The captain of the *RMS Olympic* said that, "In all my 31 years as a White Star captain, I have never heard of such a theory as suction."

The captain's name was Edward J. Smith. His next commission was a ship even grander than the *Olympic*. It was *RMS Titanic*.

As we continue to build a body of work on the Rules of Navigation, many of the rules don't deserve a full article but do deserve to be noted. I want to expand this month's column with rules that are around Rule #2 and get these into your sea log.

**Rule 1 says:** "These Rules shall apply to all vessels upon the high seas and in all waters connected therewith navigable by seagoing vessels."

**Rule 1 means:** The COLREGs apply to all of the oceans and bodies of water connected to them with respect given to the United States Inland Rules, which apply to the Great Lakes, Western Rivers and all the waterways and bays inside the magenta line COLREGs demarcation line printed on your charts. Many boaters think that the Inland Rules apply uniformly anytime they are within 3 nm of shore. Not so! The demarcation line runs along the south shore of Long Island from Montauk Point to New York Harbor – right across the inlet mouths.

**Rule 3 says:** "For the purpose of these Rules (and this Act), except where the context otherwise

requires, the word 'vessel' includes every description of water craft, including non-displacement craft, WIG craft and seaplanes, used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water."

**Rule 3 means:** Don't be surprised if the U.S. Coast Guard comes alongside to inspect your home-made raft, inner-tube or a log you're tied to.

**Rule 4, Section 1, Conduct of Vessels in any Condition of Visibility, says:** "Rules in this Section apply to any condition of visibility."

**Rule 4, Section 1, Conduct of Vessels in any Condition of Visibility, means:** "Neither rain, nor sleet, nor gloom of night" shall matter in applying Rules 5-10 to the facts of a case or in the interpretation of their use by the master of a vessel.

Be safe. Be ready. Be professional. Watch words that guide in Sector Long Island Sound...

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at [JoinUSCGAux2010@aol.com](mailto:JoinUSCGAux2010@aol.com) or go direct to John Blevins, who is in charge of new members matters, at [FSO-PS@emcg.us](mailto:FSO-PS@emcg.us) and we will help you "get in this thing..."

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