



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

“Rules-of-the-Road” for Small-scale Fishers

Convention on the International Regulations
for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972
(COLREGs)



Trainers Guidance
2022

Overview

The FISH Safety Foundation (FSF) has developed this ‘Trainers Guidance’ resource to complement the PowerPoint Package “Safety at Sea for Small-scale Fishers: Rules-of-the-Road”. The following legislation and guidelines were referenced here:

- the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 (COLREGs) as published by the IMO,
- the standards and recommendations provided in the FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries No.1 Supplement 3 Fishing Operations: Best Practices to improve Safety at Sea in the Fisheries Sector (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4740e.pdf>), and
- other relevant IMO, ILO and FAO safety codes, marine traffic rules, recommendations and international agreements, such as the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) and particularly Articles 6.16 to 6.18, which require States to promote measures that are consistent with international guidelines of FAO, ILO and IMO for work in fishing and sea safety in small-scale fisheries.

Notes:

- ColRegs are a legislative standard which requires a standardised approach to training. They apply to all vessels, and must be followed at all times, irrespective of vessel size.
- We would expect the trainer to put the required information into a spoken form, and sometimes simplified version that gets the information across in a way that suits that audience. And there are a number of visual representations of actions to be taken, etc.
- Keep in mind that, these are international rules and regulations. Any relevant **National level maritime traffic regulations always prevail and should be followed.**

Topics to be discussed / Content recommended to cover

- Provide the background to the rules
- Describe the responsibility to comply with the rules:
 - “Rules-of-the-Road” apply to all vessels!
 - Fishers must know what the Rules are, and what they mean
 - Fishers must obey the Rules at all times
- Give examples of circumstances which may make a departure from the rules necessary
- Describe the general definitions which apply throughout the rules
- Explain 'a proper look-out' and interprets the intent of 'full appraisal of the situation and the risk of collision'
- Explain the context of Rule 5:
 - Explain what is meant by a safe speed
 - describe how 'proper and effective action' and 'within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions' may be interpreted
 - describe the factors to be taken into account in determining a safe speed
 - explain how visibility affects the determination of safe speed
- Explain what is meant by risk of collision
- Describe the proper use of all senses in determining whether a risk of collision exists
- Explain the dangers of making assumptions on the basis of scanty information, citing examples from clear weather as well as in restricted visibility
- Illustrate, using examples from practice, how failure to plot may lead to a lack of appreciation of a developing situation
- Illustrate, using examples from practice, the following actions to avoid collision referred to in Rule 8:
 - positive action in ample time large enough to be readily apparent
 - alteration of course alone
 - passing at a safe distance
 - checking the effectiveness of action taken
 - reduction of speed
 - taking all way off
- Describe how to proceed along the course of a narrow channel
- Describe the navigation of small craft and sailing vessels in a narrow channel
- Describe the conduct of vessels engaged in fishing
- Describe the requirements for vessels:
 - anchoring
 - engaged in fishing

- State that a vessel of less than 20 metres in length or a sailing vessel must not impede the safe passage of a power-driven vessel following a traffic lane
- Explain what is meant by 'vessels in sight of one another'
- Demonstrate, with the use of models displaying proper signals or lights, a navigation light simulator or otherwise (if available), the proper action to take to avoid collision with other vessels in sight
- Explain how to decide when a vessel is an overtaking vessel
- Compare the various avoiding actions which may be taken by an overtaking vessel
- Explain the application of Rule 14, Head-on Situation
- Explain why the give-way vessel in a crossing situation shall, if the circumstances admit, avoid crossing ahead of the other vessel
- Explain how Rule 16 and Rule 8 relate regarding the action by a give-way vessel
- Explain the position of stand-on vessel in cases where a risk of collision exists between more than two vessels
- Explain how to decide when to take avoiding action as stand-on vessel
- Describe the actions which may be taken by the stand-on vessel
- Describe the avoiding action which must be taken by the stand-on vessel
- State that a potential collision situation may be divided into the following four stages:
 - at long range, before risk of collision exists and both vessels are free to take any action
 - when risk of collision applies, the give-way vessel is required to take action and the other vessel must keep her course and speed
 - when the give-way vessel is not taking appropriate action
 - when collision cannot be avoided by the action of the give-way vessel alone
- Explain the responsibilities between vessels with reference to Rules 18 and 3
- Explain the application of Rule 19
- Compare Rule 6 and Rule 19 regarding the determination of safe speed
- Demonstrate, using models, a manoeuvring board or similar, how to determine risk of collision and the proper action to take to avoid collision in restricted visibility
- Describe the application of the rules concerning Lights and shape
- Describe the visibility of lights as prescribed by Rule 22
- Identify the lights and shapes carried by any type of vessel and the operation or circumstances signified by them, including the additional signals for fishing vessels fishing in close proximity
- Describe the positioning, spacing and screening of lights
- Describe the shapes required by the rules
- Describe the sound signals to be used by vessels in sight of one another
- Describe the sound signals to be used in or near an area of restricted visibility
- Describe the use of signals to attract attention

Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 (COLREGs): Summary (IMO Website)

The 1972 Convention was designed to update and replace the Collision Regulations of 1960 which were adopted at the same time as the 1960 SOLAS Convention.

Adoption: 20 October 1972; Entry into force: 15 July 1977

One of the most important innovations in the 1972 COLREGs was the recognition given to traffic separation schemes - Rule 10 gives guidance in determining safe speed, the risk of collision and the conduct of vessels operating in or near traffic separation schemes.

The first such traffic separation scheme was established in the Dover Strait in 1967. It was operated on a voluntary basis at first but in 1971 the IMO Assembly adopted a resolution stating that that observance of all traffic separation schemes be made mandatory - and the COLREGs make this obligation clear.

Technical provisions

The COLREGs include 41 rules divided into six sections: Part A - General; Part B - Steering and Sailing; Part C - Lights and Shapes; Part D - Sound and Light signals; Part E - Exemptions; and Part F - Verification of compliance with the provisions of the Convention. There are also four Annexes containing technical requirements concerning lights and shapes and their positioning; sound signalling appliances; additional signals for fishing vessels when operating in close proximity, and international distress signals.

Part A - General (Rules 1-3)

Rule 1 states that the rules apply to all vessels upon the high seas and all waters connected to the high seas and navigable by seagoing vessels.

Rule 2 covers the responsibility of the master, owner and crew to comply with the rules.

Rule 3 includes definitions.

Part B- Steering and Sailing (Rules 4-19)

Section 1 - Conduct of vessels in any condition of visibility (Rules 4-10)

Rule 4 says the section applies in any condition of visibility.

Rule 5 requires that "every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.

Rule 6 deals with safe speed. It requires that: "Every vessel shall at all times proceed at a safe speed...". The Rule describes the factors which should be taken into account in determining safe speed. Several of these refer specifically to vessels equipped with radar.

The importance of using "all available means" is further stressed in

Rule 7 covering risk of collision, which warns that "assumptions shall not be made on the basis of scanty information, especially scanty radar information"

Rule 8 covers action to be taken to avoid collision.

In Rule 9 a vessel proceeding along the course of a narrow channel or fairway is obliged to keep "as near to the outer limit of the channel or fairway which lies on her starboard side as is safe and practicable." The same Rule obliges a vessel of less than 20 metres in length or a sailing vessel not to impede the passage of a vessel "which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway."

The Rule also forbids ships to cross a narrow channel or fairway "if such crossing impedes the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within such channel or fairway." The meaning "not to impede" was clarified by an amendment to Rule 8 in 1987. A new paragraph (f) was added, stressing that a vessel which was required not to impede the passage of another vessel should take early action to allow sufficient sea room for the safe passage of the other vessel. Such vessel was obliged to fulfil this obligation also when taking avoiding action in accordance with the steering and sailing rules when risk of collision exists.

Rule 10 of the Collision Regulations deals with the behaviour of vessels in or near traffic separation schemes adopted by the Organization. By regulation 8 of Chapter V (Safety of Navigation) of SOLAS, IMO is recognized as being the only organization competent to deal with international measures concerning the routing of ships.

The effectiveness of traffic separation schemes can be judged from a study made by the International Association of Institutes of Navigation (IAIN) in 1981. This showed that between 1956 and 1960 there were 60 collisions in the Strait of Dover; twenty years later, following the introduction of traffic separation schemes, this total was cut to only 16.

In other areas where such schemes did not exist the number of collisions rose sharply. New traffic separation schemes are introduced regularly and existing ones are amended when necessary to respond to changed traffic conditions. To enable this to be done as quickly as possible the MSC has been authorized to adopt and amend traffic separation schemes on behalf of the Organization.

Rule 10 states that ships crossing traffic lanes are required to do so "as nearly as practicable at right angles to the general direction of traffic flow." This reduces confusion to other ships as to the crossing vessel's intentions and course and at the same time enables that vessel to cross the lane as quickly as possible.

Fishing vessels "shall not impede the passage of any vessel following a traffic lane" but are not banned from fishing. This is in line with Rule 9 which states that "a vessel engaged in fishing shall not impede the passage of any other vessel navigating within a narrow channel or fairway." In 1981 the regulations were amended. Two new paragraphs were added to Rule 10 to exempt vessels which are restricted in their ability to manoeuvre "when engaged in an operation for the safety of navigation in a traffic separation scheme" or when engaged in cable laying.

In 1987 the regulations were again amended. It was stressed that Rule 10 applies to traffic separation schemes adopted by the Organization (IMO) and does not relieve any vessel of her obligation under any other rule. It was also to clarify that if a vessel is obliged to cross traffic lanes it should do so as nearly as practicable at right angles to the general direction of the traffic flow. In 1989 Regulation 10 was further amended to clarify the vessels which may use the "inshore traffic zone."

Section II - Conduct of vessels in sight of one another (Rules 11-18)

Rule 11 says the section applies to vessels in sight of one another.

Rule 12 states action to be taken when two sailing vessels are approaching one another.

Rule 13 covers overtaking - the overtaking vessel should keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken.

Rule 14 deals with head-on situations. Crossing situations are covered by Rule 15 and action to be taken by the give-way vessel is laid down in Rule 16.

Rule 17 deals with the action of the stand-on vessel, including the provision that the stand-on vessel may "take action to avoid collision by her manoeuvre alone as soon as it becomes apparent to her that the vessel required to keep out of the way is not taking appropriate action.

Rule 18 deals with responsibilities between vessels and includes requirements for vessels which shall keep out of the way of others.

Section III - conduct of vessels in restricted visibility (Rule 19)

Rule 19 states every vessel should proceed at a safe speed adapted to prevailing circumstances and restricted visibility. A vessel detecting by radar another vessel should determine if there is risk of collision and if so take avoiding action. A vessel hearing fog signal of another vessel should reduce speed to a minimum.

Part C Lights and Shapes (Rules 20-31)

Rule 20 states rules concerning lights apply from sunset to sunrise. Rule 21 gives definitions.

Rule 22 covers visibility of lights - indicating that lights should be visible at minimum ranges (in nautical miles) determined according to the type of vessel.

Rule 23 covers lights to be carried by power-driven vessels underway.

Rule 24 covers lights for vessels towing and pushing.

Rule 25 covers light requirements for sailing vessels underway and vessels under oars.

Rule 26 covers light requirements for fishing vessels. * Note: this is to be read in conjunction with ANNEX II ADDITIONAL SIGNALS FOR FISHING VESSELS FISHING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY (added in this pack)

Rule 27 covers light requirements for vessels not under command or restricted in their ability to manoeuvre.

Rule 28 covers light requirements for vessels constrained by their draught.

Rule 29 covers light requirements for pilot vessels.

Rule 30 covers light requirements for vessels anchored and aground. Rule 31 covers light requirements for seaplanes

Part D - Sound and Light Signals (Rules 32-37)

Rule 32 gives definitions of whistle, short blast, and prolonged blast.

Rule 33 says vessels 12 metres or more in length should carry a whistle and a bell and vessels 100 metres or more in length should carry in addition a gong.

Rule 34 covers manoeuvring and warning signals, using whistle or lights.

Rule 35 covers sound signals to be used in restricted visibility.

Rule 36 covers signals to be used to attract attention.

Rule 37 covers distress signals.

Part E - Exemptions (Rule 38)

Rule 38 says ships which comply with the 1960 Collision Regulations and were built or already under construction when the 1972 Collision Regulations entered into force may be exempted from some requirements for light and sound signals for specified periods.

Part F - Verification of compliance with the provisions of the Convention

The Rules, adopted in 2013, bring in the requirements for compulsory audit of Parties to the Convention.

Rule 39 provides definitions.

Rule 40 says that Contracting Parties shall use the provisions of the Code for Implementation in the execution of their obligations and responsibilities contained in the present Convention.

Rule 41 on Verification of compliance says that every Contracting Party is subject to periodic audits by IMO.

Annexes

The COLREGs include four annexes:

Annex I - Positioning and technical details of lights and shapes

Annex II - Additional signals for fishing vessels fishing in close proximity *(reproduced next)

Annex III - Technical details of sound signal appliances

Annex IV - Distress signals, which lists the signals indicating distress and need of assistance.

ANNEX II:
ADDITIONAL SIGNALS FOR FISHING VESSELS FISHING
IN CLOSE PROXIMITY

Given the specific requirements to the fishing sector here, this ANNEX is reproduced in full.

1. GENERAL

The lights mentioned herein shall, if exhibited in pursuance of Rule 26(d), be placed where they can best be seen. They shall be at least 0.9 metre apart but at a lower level than lights prescribed in Rule 26(b)(i) and (c)(i). The lights shall be visible all round the horizon at a distance of at least 1 mile but at a lesser distance than the lights prescribed by these Rules for fishing vessels.

2. SIGNALS FOR TRAWLERS

(a) Vessels when engaged in trawling, whether using demersal or pelagic gear, may exhibit:

- (i) when shooting their nets: two white lights in a vertical line;
- (ii) when hauling their nets: one white light over one red light in a vertical line;
- (iii) when the net has come fast upon an obstruction: two red lights in a vertical line.

(b) Each vessel engaged in pair trawling may exhibit:

- (i) by night, a searchlight directed forward and in the direction of the other vessel of the pair;
- (ii) when shooting or hauling their nets or when their nets have come fast upon an obstruction, the lights prescribed in 2(a) above.

(c) A vessel of less than 20 m in length engaged in trawling, whether using demersal or pelagic gear or engaged in pair trawling, may exhibit the lights prescribed in paragraphs (a) or (b) of this section, as appropriate.

3. SIGNALS FOR PURSE SEINERS

Vessels engaged in fishing with purse seine gear may exhibit two yellow lights in a vertical line. These lights shall flash alternately every second and with equal light and occultation duration. These lights may be exhibited only when the vessel is hampered by its fishing gear.

The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (1972) (“COLREGS”) and Fishing Vessels

The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (1972) (“COLREGS”) specify lights or daytime signals that should be shown by fishing vessels engaged in different types of fishing, and which vessels have right of way under differing circumstances.

The term “vessel engaged in fishing” means any vessel fishing with nets, lines, trawls or other fishing apparatus which restrict manoeuvrability, but does not include a vessel fishing with trolling lines or other fishing apparatus which does not restrict manoeuvrability.

In general, both sailing boats and power-driven vessels should give way to vessels engaged in fishing. Exceptions to this rule include:

- A vessel engaged in fishing shall not impede the passage of any other vessel navigating within a narrow channel or fairway.
- For Traffic Separation Zones –
 - A vessel engaged in fishing shall not impede the passage of any vessel following a traffic lane.
 - A vessel other than a crossing vessel or a vessel joining or leaving a lane shall not normally enter a separation zone or cross a separation line except to engage in fishing within a separation zone.
- A vessel engaged in fishing when underway shall, so far as possible, keep out of the way of:
 - a vessel not under command;
 - a vessel restricted in her ability to manoeuvre.

Lights and signals that should be shown by vessels engaged in different types of fishing are detailed later.

The Most Important Rules: Detail for Discussion

COLREGs Rule 2: Responsibility

It's Your Responsibility

Rule 2 is a vital rule that is often misunderstood. It is different from the majority of the COLREGs because it does not tell you what to do or when to do it. Instead, Rule 2 highlights the fact that you are responsible for your own actions. You are the one who has to make the immediate decision on what to do in order to comply with the rules.

Rule 2 makes you responsible to your fellow crew and to the ships around you. Your responsibility is not only to follow the COLREGs – you are also responsible for doing everything necessary to avoid the risk of collision and the dangers of navigation.

- Rule 2(a) requires you to follow both the rules and 'the ordinary practice of seamen'. This means that you must always use common sense.
- Rule 2(b) is often misunderstood so read it carefully. It only allows you to depart from the rules if that is the only way to avoid an immediate danger. But, in almost every situation, it is the proper application of the rules that will keep you out of that danger. Rule 2(b) is never a justification for not following the rules properly.

Rule 2 allows no excuses. It is written in old-fashioned language so please read it carefully and often to make sure that you understand it. Always ask yourself:

- How does Rule 2 apply to this situation?
- What does Rule 2 require me to do?

Summary It is always your responsibility to comply with COLREGs and avoid collisions.

COLREGs Rule 5: Look-out

Keep a Look-out

Between them, Rule 2 on responsibility and Rule 5 are the most important of all the COLREGs.

Rule 5 is short but it has two vital elements.

- You must pay attention to everything – not just looking ahead out of the bridge windows but looking all around the vessel, using all your senses and all personnel and equipment available to you. There must always be someone looking-out. If weather or the situation around you causes concern, then more lookouts may be needed and you must call them without hesitation.
- You must use all of that information continuously to assess the situation your vessel is in and the risk of collision.

The requirement to ‘maintain a proper lookout’ includes:

- Looking and listening – maintain a continuous watch by sight and by hearing, both inside and outside the wheelhouse.
- Looking means looking out of the windows, all the time.
- Using a radio – you must listen to what is going on around you but you must always think carefully before calling other ships on VHF. It always takes more time than you think and it may cause delay and confusion.
- Monitoring sound signals – ensure you can hear what is going on around you.
- Using a depth indicator – frequently and systematically monitor the depth of water beneath your keel.
- Always remember that you are required to keep the boat safe, as set out in Rule 2 on responsibility.

To assess the risk of collision you must continuously ask yourself:

- Is a collision possible, because of the action (or inaction) of any vessel in the vicinity –including your own vessel?
- Is a collision probable? If so, the risk of collision is already here and you need to act urgently. See also Rule 7 on risk of collision.

Summary Always keep a proper look out.

COLREGs Rule 6: Safe Speed

Check Your Speed

Rule 6 requires you to make your own judgement on the appropriate speed for your vessel, taking into account the situation you are in and the situation you are moving towards. Excessive speed contributes to many collisions.

Rule 5 on look-out and Rule 6 are closely linked. If you do not obey Rule 5, then you cannot obey Rule 6.

Generally, a 'safe speed' is a reduced speed, because:

- In most cases, if either ship reduces speed, their closest point of approach (CPA) will increase. The risk of collision will then reduce.
- It gives you more time to think and to act. Time to think and to act is all important – too much speed and too little time can fatally impair your risk assessment processes.
- It allows you to stop more effectively.
- If a collision does occur, the resulting damage will be a lot less.

Remember:

- You are responsible for proceeding at a safe speed. If an alteration of speed is necessary, then you do not have to ask permission.
- Constantly monitor your speed – the situation at sea is always changing and a safe speed in one situation can be too fast in another. Situations can change suddenly. Maintaining a high speed for commercial reasons is no excuse and no defence for proceeding at an unsafe speed.

Summary Always travel at a safe speed.

COLREGs Rule 7: Risk of Collision

Risk of Collision

Rule 5 on look-out and Rule 7 are also closely linked. Under Rule 5 you must use all available means to collect information on the situation around you (look-out) and under Rule 7 you must use that information continuously to assess the risk of collision.

To assess the risk of collision you must continuously ask yourself:

- Is a collision **possible**, because of the action (or inaction) of any vessel in the vicinity – including our own vessel?
- Is a collision **probable**? If so, the risk of collision is already here and you need to act urgently.

This risk-assessment process is essential if you are to take appropriate action – see Rule 8 action to avoid collision.

Risk-assessment techniques include:

- Look and listen – as with keeping a lookout, you must use all the information and equipment available to determine the risk of collision.
- Use the compass to check the bearing of approaching vessels, and do this regularly. A steady bearing indicates the risk of collision but a risk of collision may exist even with a bearing change, particularly at close range and with large vessels.
- Do not just rely on a change of bearing as an indicator of clearance. As a target ship approaches, its change of bearing should accelerate significantly. If the change of bearing does not accelerate then there is a risk of collision.

Do not relax – keep monitoring the situation until the target ship is passed and clear.

Summary Always assess the risk of collision.

COLREGs Rule 8: Action to Avoid Collision

Do Something and Do it Early

As soon as you identify a risk of collision, you must identify the correct action to avoid collision to ensure the vessels will pass at 'a safe distance'. You should then take that action to avoid collision as soon as it is appropriate to do so. Action to avoid collision should always be:

- Positive – make a big alteration of course and/or speed.
- Made in good time – which means early.
- Seamanlike – do not make the situation worse for any other ship in the vicinity, assess what they may have to do.
- Easily seen by the other ship(s) – avoid a series of small alterations of course and/or speed.

Remember, a substantial alteration made early is better than a very large alteration made late. The closer you are to the other vessel the greater the risk of collision and the more you will have to do to pass at a safe distance. Small alterations of course and speed are dangerous; they do not often solve the problem and they do not give the other vessel a clear indication of what you are doing.

Remember to make appropriate sound and light signals. You should confirm your action to avoid collision by monitoring the change in CPA. Keep taking compass bearings and checking the situation until the risk of collision is over. And remember your engine – if your ability to alter course is constrained then slow down or stop.

Giving way and not impeding

- If the COLREGs require you 'not to impede' or 'give way to' another vessel, then you must take very early action to make sure risk of collision does not develop.
- If you are the 'not to be impeded' or stand-on vessel, then you must always be prepared for the give-way vessel not to take the correct action. If a risk of collision develops, you will have to act – remember the caution in Rule 2 on responsibilities and your continuing responsibilities in Rule 17 on action by the stand-on vessel.

Summary Always do something positive and timely to avoid a collision.

COLREGs Rule 13: Overtaking

Keep Clear When Overtaking

Rule 13 has no exceptions; ***the overtaking vessel always keeps out of the way.***

If you are not sure whether you are overtaking another vessel, then Rule 13 says that you are.

Remember:

- Always presume the other ship does not know you are there.
- Avoid crossing ahead – it is always safer to cross astern.
- Do not pass close – overtaking always takes time, so make sure both ships have plenty of room to manoeuvre. Never assume that the other ship will maintain its course and speed.
- Beware of interaction – if you are forced to pass close, be very careful of interaction between the two vessels.

Remain vigilant – remember; you remain an overtaking vessel until you are finally passed and clear. ***Once you are an overtaking vessel, you are always an overtaking vessel.***

Summary Always keep clear of a ship you are overtaking.

COLREGs Rule 14: Head-on Situation

Ship Ahead

If there is a ship ahead you should alter course to starboard.

The ship does not need to be exactly right ahead – Rule 14 applies to any vessel coming towards you on a roughly opposite course and roughly within half a point (6 or 7 degrees) on either side of your bow.

At night, if you can see the other ship's masthead lights and/or both its sidelights, then Rule 14 applies. If you are not sure, then Rule 14 still applies.

To understand Rule 14, you must also understand Rule 8 on action to avoid a collision and Rule 16 on action by the give-way vessel.

- Rule 8(a) says, 'Any action to avoid collision shall be taken in accordance with the Rules of this Part' ('this Part' being the steering and sailing rules). This means that if you have a vessel fine to starboard, even some distance away, altering to port to increase the 'green to green' clearance may not be in accordance with the COLREGs.
- If there is any risk of collision then you should always go to starboard, as Rule 14 says.
- Rule 16 says that if you are to keep out of the way, you must take early and substantial action. This means you should alter your course good and early.
- Do not wait for the other vessel to act. The closer you get, the bigger the alteration you will have to make.

Summary Always alter course to starboard when you see a ship approaching you from ahead.

COLREGs Rule 15: Crossing Situation

Watch Vessels to Starboard

A vessel crossing from your starboard side has right of way.

The other vessel will be watching you carefully and it will be anxious until it knows you are taking the correct action.

Make life easy for both ships:

- Give way early – if you are the give-way vessel, then take early action so the other vessel knows your intentions.
- Avoid crossing ahead – if possible, always go to starboard and go astern of the other vessel.
- Be considerate – if the other vessel is hampered in any way, then your early action will reassure it.
- Be positive – especially if you are in any doubt.
- Do not forget your engine – you always have the option of using your engine as well as your helm. Slowing down will give both ships more time and more space.

Summary Always give way to a ship you see crossing from your starboard side.

COLREGs Rule 16: Action by Give-way Vessel

Keep Everyone Happy

Rule 16 is one of the shortest rules but it makes life easier for everyone. The basic points are:

- Do not hesitate – alter course or speed early.
- Do not make small alterations – only a big alteration of course or speed will show the other vessel exactly what you are doing.
- Do not assume anything – keep checking the CPA and keep taking compass bearings to make sure your action has the desired effect.
- Keep everybody happy.

Following Rule 16 makes life easier for all vessels. If the other vessel is happy with your alteration there is less chance of it doing something unexpected. Treat other vessels as you would like to be treated yourself. Good seamanship includes courtesy and common sense.

Summary Always give way to a stand-on ship early, clearly and courteously.

COLREGs Rule 17: Action by Stand-on Vessel

Is It Giving Way?

Rule 17 is one of the harder rules to understand and to follow. If you are the 'stand-on vessel' then you cannot relax. Rule 17 has three stages and you must identify and assess each of them:

- Rule 17(a)(i): when you are the 'stand-on vessel', you must keep your course and speed. You must not do anything unexpected.
- Rule 17(a)(ii): 'as soon as it becomes apparent' that the give-way vessel is not taking appropriate action, then you may take your own action to avoid a collision.
- Rule 17(b): when a collision cannot be avoided by the give-way vessel alone, then you must take the best action you can to avoid colliding. Your action under Rule 17(b) must still be in time to avoid a collision so you must not leave it too late.

But do not go to port in a crossing situation – if the other ship goes to starboard, as it should, then both ships will turn towards each other.

Do not forget the 'wake up' signal under Rule 34(d) on manoeuvring and warning signals. Blow your horn and flash your lights at the other vessel but think twice before calling it on VHF, because that always takes valuable time during which the risk of collision will increase.

Summary When approaching a give-way ship, maintain course and speed but always be prepared to take action to avoid a collision.

COLREGs Rule 19: Conduct of Vessels in Restricted Visibility

Restricted Visibility Changes Everything

Different rules apply in restricted visibility. Restricted visibility includes fog, mist, snow, heavy rain and sandstorms – any situation where you cannot see the other ship or its navigation lights. There are no ‘stand-on’ or ‘give-way’ vessels in restricted visibility. Every vessel must take action and every vessel must proceed at a safe speed with its engines ready for immediate manoeuvre.

You must assess if your ship is getting close to another ship and/or if there is a risk of collision. In both cases you should:

- Avoid altering to port for a vessel forward of the beam, except for a vessel you are overtaking (Rule 19(d)(i)).
- Avoid altering towards any ship abeam or abaft the beam (Rule 19(d)(ii)).

You should also remember Rule 7 on risk of collision – there is a risk of collision if you are in any doubt.

And remember Rule 5 on look-out – you must always maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing.

Summary Always be prepared to give way to ships you cannot see.