

# RULES OF THE ROAD: Does Each Crewmember Know Them?



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- *Both in safety and in doubt always keep a good look out. In Danger, with no room to turn, Ease her, Stop her, Go Astern.*

I'll always remember one evening watch when another fishing vessel forced us to veer off course to prevent a collision, though we had the right of way. One shipmate wasn't surprised. He'd fished one season on that boat and told me that its rule was, "When in danger or in doubt, run in circles, scream and shout!"

Well, this doesn't rhyme, but here's what I recommend when you're in sight of another vessel but are unsure of its intentions: Signal your "doubt" with five short blasts on the whistle, and use VHF, radiophone or day signals.

It's essential for skippers to keep their crews thinking like that and focused on the seaborne rules of the road, especially when a season is just starting or after long periods ashore.

Since man first went to sea, vessels have crossed courses, overtaken and passed other boats safely. But that's not always the case. BC's fishing industry has seen many collisions in fair weather and foul, with good and poor visibility as vessels raced to set on the same school of fish, cut too closely across one another's bows, overtaken someone slower and ran over tow lines.

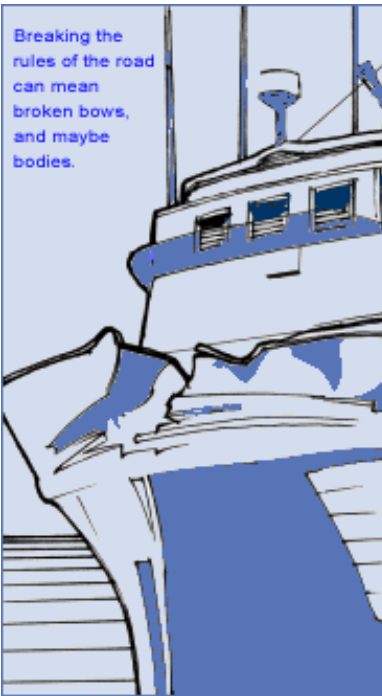
On a calm night, a tug pushing a barge and a fishing vessel were traveling towards each other in good visibility collided with the fishing vessel sustaining minor damage. Under similar conditions, the six-man crew of another fishing vessel perished when it collided with a tug.

A common factor in both cases was incorrect interpretation of navigation lights. In fact, many collisions result from watch-keeping errors and misinterpreting what an approaching vessel's intentions are.

Seaborne traffic accidents like these led to creation of the International Collision Regulations. With some modification, the Canada Shipping Act made those regulations this country's seaborne "rules of the road." They define responsibilities between vessels on Canadian navigable waters, including obligations when meeting head-on, crossing and overtaking in sight of one another in good and restricted visibility. For instance, meeting on reciprocal or nearly reciprocal courses with some risk of collision, two power-driven vessels must alter course to starboard to pass on one another's port side.

That regulatory requirement echoes an anonymous mariner's poem that says in part:

- *When all three lights I see ahead, turn to Starboard and show my Red: Green to Green, Red to Red, Perfect Safety — Go Ahead.*



An effective way to build watch-keeping abilities is for the skipper to hold periodic crew talks on various parts of the rules of the road, and to let crewmembers take turns leading the discussion so they think about the issues from that perspective and are likely to learn more than as passive observers or listeners.

Where do you get the information? These don't rhyme either, but here are two good sources:

- Transport Canada at <http://www.tc.gc.ca/acts-regulations/GENERAL/C/csa/regulations/010/csa014/csa14.html>
- WorkSafeBC at [http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health\\_and\\_safety/by\\_topic/assets/pdf/marine\\_guide.pdf](http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_and_safety/by_topic/assets/pdf/marine_guide.pdf)

Email comments to [Elen.Hanson@worksafebc.com](mailto:Elen.Hanson@worksafebc.com), or phone her at 604-233-4008 in the Lower Mainland and toll-free elsewhere in BC to 1-888-621-7233.



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