

A-5: CONVENTION ON THE INTERNATIONAL REGULATIONS FOR PREVENTING COLLISIONS AT SEA

Name of the convention: Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea

Acronym or short name: COLREG

International organisation in charge of it: International Maritime Organization (IMO)

Summary description (in plain language): 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. 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 COLREGs include 38 rules divided into five sections: Part A - General; Part B - Steering and Sailing; Part C - Lights and Shapes; Part D - Sound and Light signals; and Part E - Exemptions. 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.

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."

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.

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.

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 Lights 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.

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; **Annex III** - Technical details of sound signal appliances; **Annex IV** - Distress signals, which lists the signals indicating distress and need of assistance.

Annexes I and IV were amended in 1987 to clarify the positioning of certain lights carried on smaller vessels and to add "approved signals transmitted by radiocommunications systems" (ie distress alerts transmitted in the GMDSS). A section on location signals from search and rescue radar transponders was added in 1993.

Date of first approval: 20 October 1972

Date of coming into force: 15 July 1977

Dates of revision and Reasons of revisions:

- **The 1981 amendments:** the most important change concerns rule 10, which has been amended to enable vessels carrying out various safety operations, such as dredging or surveying, to carry out these functions in traffic separation schemes.
- **The 1987 amendments** affect several rules, including rule 1(e) on vessels of special construction: the amendment classifies the application of the Convention to such ships; Rule 3(h), which defines a vessel constrained by her draught; Rule 10(c) crossing traffic lanes.
- **The 1989 amendments** concerns Rule 10 and is designed to stop unnecessary use of the inshore traffic zone.

- **The 1993 amendments** are mostly concerned with the positioning of lights.

- **The 2001 amendments** include new rules relating to Wing-in Ground (WIG) craft. The following are amended: General Definitions (Rule 3) - to provide the definition of wing-in-ground (WIG) craft; Action to avoid collision (Rule 8 (a)) - to make it clear that any action to avoid collision should be taken in accordance with the relevant rules in the COLREGs and to link Rule 8 with the other steering and sailing rules; Responsibilities between vessels (Rule 18) - to include a requirement that a WIG craft, when taking off, landing and in flight near the surface, shall keep clear of all other vessels and avoid impeding their navigation and also that a WIG craft operating on the water surface shall comply with the Rules as for a power-driven vessel; Power-driven vessels underway (Rule 23) - to include a requirement that WIG craft shall, in addition to the lights prescribed in paragraph 23 (a) of the Rule, exhibit a high-intensity all-round flashing red light when taking off, landing and in-flight near the surface; Seaplanes (Rule 31) - to include a provision for WIG craft; Equipment for sound signals and sound signals in restricted visibility (Rules 33 and 35) - to cater for small vessels; Positioning and technical details of lights and shapes (Annex I) - amendments with respect to high-speed craft (relating to the vertical separation of masthead lights); and Technical details of sound signal appliances (Annex III) - amendments with respect to whistles and bell or gong to cater for small vessels.

Applicability (situation of ratification): The convention shall enter into force 12 months after the date on which at least 15 states, the aggregate of whose merchant fleets constitutes not less than 65% by number or by tonnage of the world fleet of vessels of 100 gross tons and over have become Parties to it, whichever is achieved first (art.IV).

Stakes for ports: Ports may be liable for the traffic separation scheme which deals with the guidance in determining safe speed, the risk of collision and the conduct of vessels operating in or near traffic separation schemes. They have to provide safe rules regarding to the traffic separation scheme (rule 10).

Links with other conventions: [SOLAS](#)

Key-words: collision, prevention, regulations, traffic separation scheme, responsibility

Internet hyperlink with other website:

<http://www.imo.org/>

<http://www.comitemaritime.org/>

(full text) <http://www.admiraltylawguide.com/conven/collisions1972.html>