



New York City Boating “Rules of the Road”



The United States Coast Guard Navigation Rules or “Rules of the Road” define which vessels have the right-of-way vis-à-vis the array of vessels boating in New York Harbor and its surrounding waterways.

While the Rules focus primarily on large, commercial traffic, it is the responsibility of all recreational boaters—including sailors and human-powered boaters—to familiarize themselves and abide by these Rules.

Recreational boaters should be aware of USCG Navigation Rule # 9, in particular, which states:

(a) A vessel of less than 20 meters (about 65 feet) in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the passage of a vessel that can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway.

(b) A vessel engaged in fishing shall not impede the passage of any other vessel navigating within a narrow channel or fairway.

Boaters must stay out of the way of large vessels working in the channels, and if you’re fishing, you must stay out of the way of *any* boat in the channel.

Per USCG Navigation Rule # 33 (b), all boaters must have a means of making an efficient sound signal. If operating after dark, boaters must also have visible lights on their vessel.

New York State Navigation laws state that everyone under 12 years of age must wear a personal flotation device (PFD) while onboard a boat underway, and that a PFD be available for every individual onboard. Also, effective November 2009, *anyone* onboard a boat 21 feet or less operating from November 1 to May 1 must be wearing a PFD.

In addition to USCG Navigation Rules and NYS boating laws, Parks strongly recommends to all boaters that they:

Carry a hand-held VHF and familiarize themselves with the various working frequencies and hailing protocols used in different situations by the various types of vessels operating in New York Harbor. A cell phone, while good to have aboard, is not a substitute for a VHF when it comes to contacting other vessels in the harbor.

Know the location of ferry docks and commercial docks and stay clear of them.

Be aware of the many Safety and Security Zones in New York Harbor. Vessels need to stay 25 yards away from facilities that have posted Security Zone signs on their waterfront, as well as all bridge abutments and tunnel ventilators. Boaters may not come within 100 yards of any naval vessel. For up-to-date information about charted Security and Safety Zones, boaters should check the United States Coast Guard’s homeport website at homeport.uscg.mil before heading out.

Check the local weather forecast and tide information with the National Weather Service either on-line at weather.gov or on VHF before you leave the dock.

Always leave a float plan with a friend or your marina.

Be familiar with the sound signals large vessels use, this will help you predict and respond to their movements.

Never consume alcohol before or while boating.

Finally, all boaters should take a safe boating course.