



SOLAS V

For Pleasure Craft

On 1 July 2002, some new regulations came into force, which directly affect you as a pleasure boat user. These regulations are part of Chapter V of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, otherwise known as SOLAS V. Most of the SOLAS convention only applies to large commercial ships, but parts of Chapter V apply to small, privately owned pleasure craft. The regulations described in this leaflet apply to you. Full SOLAS V text can be found online.

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In addition to SOLAS V, pleasure boat users should note that the International Convention for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs) applies and therefore you should ensure that the correct lights and shapes are carried and appropriately displayed. The COLREGs are reproduced in MSN 1781 available at www.gov.uk. The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) also applies. You should not discharge oil or drop garbage into the sea and vessels over 12m should display a placard. Vessels over 13.7m in length are required to meet certain life saving and fire protection requirements. Please refer to MGN 489 'Pleasure Vessels - UK Regulations', for more useful information.



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Photograph by William Payne

Voyage Planning

Regulation V/34 'Safe Navigation and avoidance of dangerous situations', is a new regulation. It concerns prior-planning for your boating trip, more commonly known as voyage or passage planning. Voyage planning is basically common sense. As a pleasure boat user, you should particularly take into account the following points when planning a boating trip:

- weather: before you go boating, check the weather forecast and get regular updates if you are planning to be out for any length of time.
- tides: check the tidal predictions for your trip and ensure that they fit with what you are planning to do.
- limitations of the vessel: consider whether your boat is up to the proposed trip and that you have sufficient safety equipment and stores with you.
- crew: take into account the experience and physical ability of your crew. Crew members suffering from cold, tiredness and seasickness won't be able to do their job properly and could even result in an overburdened skipper.

- navigational dangers: make sure you are familiar with any navigational dangers you may encounter during your boating trip. This generally means checking an up to date chart and a current pilot book or almanac carried onboard.
- contingency plan: always have a contingency plan in case something goes wrong. Before you go, consider places where you can take refuge should conditions deteriorate or if you suffer an incident or injury. Bear in mind that your GPS set is vulnerable and could fail at the most inconvenient time. This might be due to problems with electrical systems, jamming or interference with the signals or meteorological activity. It is sensible and good practice to make sure you are not over-reliant on your GPS set and that you have sufficient skills and information (charts, almanac and pilot book) to navigate yourself to safety without it should it fail.
- information ashore: make sure that someone ashore knows your plans and knows what to do should they become concerned for your wellbeing. The MCA recommends joining the Coastguard Voluntary Safety Identification Scheme (commonly known as CG66) which is free and easy to join. The scheme aims to help the coastguard to help you quickly should you get into trouble while boating. It could save your life. Join CG66 online at www.gov.uk - search under CG66.

Radar Reflectors

Many large ships rely on radar for navigation and for spotting other vessels in their vicinity. So, whatever size your boat is, it is important to make sure that you can be seen by radar. SOLAS Regulation V/19 requires all small craft (less than 150GT) to fit a radar reflector or other means, to enable detection by ships navigating by radar at both 9 and 3 GHz 'if practicable'. This means if it is possible to use a radar reflector on your boat then you should use one. You should fit the largest radar reflector in terms of Radar Cross Section (RCS) that you can. Whatever length your boat is, the radar reflector should be fitted according to the

manufacturer's instructions, and as high as possible to maximise its effectiveness.

Life-Saving Signals

SOLAS Regulation V/29 requires you to have access to an illustrated table of the recognised life-saving signals, so that you can communicate with the search and rescue services, or other vessels, if you get into trouble. You can get a free copy of this table in a leaflet produced by the MCA, search www.gov.uk for 'Navigation Safety leaflets' to find a link to an ordering site. It is also available in various nautical publications as well as in Annex 2 of MGN 489. If your vessel is not suitable for carrying a copy of the table on board (because it is small or very exposed), make sure you have studied the table before you go boating.

Assistance to other Craft

Regulations V/31, V/32 and V/33 require you:

- to let the Coastguard and any other vessels in the vicinity know if you encounter anything that could cause a serious hazard to navigation, if it has not already been reported. You can do this by calling the Coastguard on VHF, if you have it on board, or by telephoning them at the earliest opportunity. The Coastguard will then warn other vessels in the area.
- to respond to any distress signal that you see or hear and help anyone or any boat in distress as best you can.

Misuse of Distress Signals

Regulation V/35 prohibits misuse of any distress signals. These are critical to safety at sea and by misusing them you could put your or someone else's life at risk.