

SAFETY AND COURTESY TIPS FOR SAILBOAT RACING IN NEWPORT HARBOR

- 1. Rules of the Road:** As you know, the Racing Rules of Sailing (“RRS”) govern racing boats during a race. But, when you encounter a non-racing vessel during a race, or after you finish among racing boats, the Inland Navigational Rules (Title 33, Chapter 34, US Code) apply (go to any search engine and search “Nautical Rules of the Road”—you’ll see the Inland Rules on many sites). Be sure you know and understand these Rules. You may be protested by the Race Committee during or after a race in which you cause a potential safety issue with a non-racing vessel due to violation of the “Rules of the Road”.
- 2. Inexperienced Boaters:** In a typical race, you may encounter non-racing vessels (including beginning sailors) whose operators do not understand the Rules of the Road, sailing, or what to do when they come in close contact with you. This will often occur as you are overtaking them or approaching them from an angle which potentially can result in unexpected maneuvers on the part of those inexperienced operators. Those boats have just as much right to be on the water as you do. Be aware of this potential safety problem and “expect the unexpected”.
- 3. Communication:** If your course will bring you in close proximity to a non-racing vessel, take early action to avoid collision or misunderstanding. And, communicate! If you are in hailing distance of another boat, in a polite and controlled manner, you can inform the other vessel of your intentions and in many cases, you will be the burdened vessel and your hail may be a simple “hold your course, we will avoid you”. Then, of course, do actually avoid the other boat! If you are the right of way boat under the Rules of the Road, the Rules still obligate you to avoid collision so if the other boat does not seem to be giving way, communicate your intentions to them and then make an early alteration of your course to avoid them, right of way notwithstanding. Remember also that a non-racing boat can be an “obstruction” under the RRS and thereby entitle you to room from your racing competitors if necessary to avoid the non-racing vessel. By the way, “communication” does not mean screaming at other vessels in an agitated manner which may exacerbate the potential problem, especially with inexperienced boaters (and good communication doesn’t include things like rudely yelling “I’m racing!” when that fact gives you no special privileges over non-racing boats).
- 4. Commercial Vessels:** The Rules of the Road require that you not impede large vessels (including the Balboa Ferry) which have limited maneuverability in “a narrow channel” which includes the Harbor. The operators of the commercial vessels are aware of the racing events such as the Beer Can Regatta and have been cooperative in the timing, routes and speed of these vessels to accommodate our racing. But, you must not obstruct/impede them so please alter your course in plenty of time if necessary to avoid such vessels. Our races can be exciting to watch for their passengers but let’s not make it too exciting.
- 5. Common Courtesy:** We are fortunate to be able to sail in one of the most beautiful harbors in this country. We are not alone in wanting to use these waterways. Yachting has a long tradition of courtesy among fellow yachtsmen and women whether their vessels are powered by sail, engines, or oars. Let’s keep our great record of courtesy throughout our racing!
- 6. Visibility, Congestion:** You are responsible under the Rules of the Road to keep a “proper look-out”. In other words, be aware of all racing and non-racing vessels around you at all times, especially during the pre-start when boats of many classes and non-racing yachts maneuver in the starting area. In order to mitigate any potential problems, and consistent with maintaining steerage in light air, consider keeping your headsail down until your preparatory signal, especially larger boats that can use auxiliary power until that time.
- 7. Accident Reporting:** You are governed by the racing rules including the preamble to Part 2 which requires compliance with government rules in relation to non-racing vessels (also remember Rule 14 regarding avoiding collisions). State and federal laws (and traditional seamanship) require you to immediately stop your boat if there is a collision involving significant damage, death, disappearance or injury. Then, you must render what help you can give and immediately call the Harbor Patrol. For such incidents, and others causing damage but not involving injury, you must provide your identification and boat registration information to the other party and if damage is over \$500, report the incident to the Harbor Patrol/Department of Boating and Waterways.