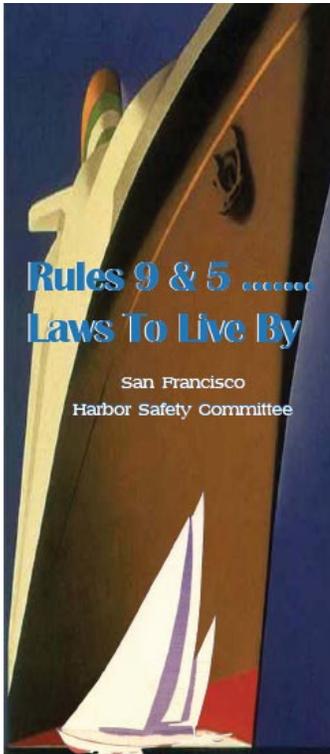


Safety: Basic Right of Way Rules

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All vessels, whether human powered, wind powered, or motorized, are subject to the International and Inland Navigational Rules of the Road. Rule 9 requires that our rowing shells not “impede the passage of a vessel that can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway.” In addition, “[a] vessel shall not cross a narrow channel or fairway if doing so impedes the passage of a vessel that can safely navigate only within that channel or fairway.”

We regularly encounter narrow channels, including the Sausalito channel and the Strawberry channel. In addition, the deep water shipping lanes in the main part of the Bay and under the Golden Gate are regulated by Rule 9. The obligation is on you, the rower, to avoid impeding a large vessel. Even a moderately sized sailboat or power boat will have Rule 9 right of way in the narrow channels, and large vessels such as tugs, cargo ships and tankers will always have that right of way over small vessels. It is best to assume that you are going to take a bad stroke and dump your boat just when it would be worst to do so — so do not cross in front of bigger vessels, wait till they pass before crossing a channel. Row a generally predictable course so that other boat traffic can see your intentions. If you start and stop constantly, you will confuse other traffic.

You should also be aware that the Coast Guard wants you to stay at least 500 yards (1/4 mile) from all large commercial vessels (see <http://www.sequoiayc.org/HomelandSecurity.pdf>). Homeland Security rules also require that you stay a minimum of 100 yards from any commercial vessel and 100 yards from any Naval vessel, including those that are moored.

Rule 5 requires that all vessels, and there are no exceptions here, keep a look out by sight and hearing “so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.” Contrary to some comments we’ve heard, there is no exception for “blind boats” such as row boats. Be in the habit of looking over alternate shoulders every 5-to-10 strokes, and more often if you are approaching a hazard.

Read, learn and understand the Rules of the Road so that whether you are rowing, paddling, sailing or motoring you know your obligations. You’ll find the Rules on the Internet at http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/mww/navrules/rotr_online.htm.

Pick up a copy of the SF Harbor Safety Committee pamphlet “Rules 9 & 5 Laws to Live By,” an excellent summary of the right of way rules for boaters. We also have a copy of the video “Sharing the Bay” that is a good review of boating safety. Ask any of the OWRC staff to look at it (it has to run in the computer CD player).