

Southern Yacht Club

RACING UNDER the USCG NAVIGATION RULES (IRPCAS)

Adapted from RYA / RORC GUIDANCE – RACING UNDER THE IRPCAS

Introduction

When a boat racing meets a vessel that is not racing, the preamble to Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS) Part 2 makes all relevant rules of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (IRPCAS) applicable between them and enforceable by protest. In US waters, the government right-of-way rules are the *USCG Navigation Rules, International - Inland*, which include the IRPCAS.

RRS 48.2 also makes IRPCAS rule 10, Traffic Separation Schemes, applicable and enforceable at all times. See below for further information.

Furthermore, sailing instructions may replace the RRS Part 2 rules with the IRPCAS. This substitution is typically made only for racing in darkness. In this situation, the whole of RRS Part 2 (When Boats Meet) is replaced by all of the right-of-way rules in IRPCAS Part B (Steering and Sailing Rules). However, Part B must be read in conjunction with the rest of the IRPCAS because, for example, it uses terms defined elsewhere in the document (see ISAF case 109 for details).

How does this affect a boat that is racing?

The IRPCAS rules are designed to prevent collisions by ensuring that vessels maintain a safe course and distance in relation to each other. Compared with the RRS they can create different rights and obligations when you meet another boat racing. They will also change the tactical options available to you in many circumstances. You must treat a boat racing exactly as you would treat a sailing boat that is not racing.

A boat racing under the IRPCAS that breaches a rule of IRPCAS Part B may be protested.

Important differences between the IRPCAS and the RRS

The notes and example below point out some important differences between the IRPCAS and the RRS but there are many others. It is vital that you read and understand the full IRPCAS rules.

Under the IRPCAS, when sailing boats meet:

- There are “opposite tack” and “windward/leeward” rules that are similar to the equivalent rules in the RRS.
- There is an “overtaking” rule that states that an overtaking boat must keep out of the way of the boat it is overtaking. This applies regardless of their tacks or which is the windward boat. In particular, this may change the game when an overlap is established from astern.
- There is no right-of-way boat; instead there is a “give-way” boat and a “stand-on” boat. Each has specific obligations towards the other. In broad terms, the give-way boat must “keep out of the way of” the other and the stand-on boat must “maintain her course and speed”.
- The obligation of the stand-on boat to maintain her course and speed is the main difference between the IRPCAS and the RRS. Under the RRS a right-of-way boat is given some scope to maneuver against a keep-clear boat. No such freedom exists under the IRPCAS.
- Similarly to the RRS, the IRPCAS require a stand-on boat to take avoiding action when it becomes clear that a give-way boat is not keeping clear. However, all changes of course required by the IRPCAS must be substantial and made in good time, so that the intentions of the boat changing course are clear to the other. This may require an earlier and larger change of course than that needed under the RRS.
- There is an IRPCAS rule that imposes special requirements in poor visibility. There is no “stand on” boat in fog!
- There are no special rules for rounding or passing marks or obstructions.

Example

IRPCAS Rule 13 (overtaking) says that a vessel is overtaking when she is “coming up ... in such a position that she would be able to see only the stern light of that vessel but neither of her sidelights” and also says that “any vessel overtaking another shall keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken”. Rule 13(d) goes on to say a boat that has come up from astern remains an overtaking boat and required to keep out of the way until she "is finally past and clear."

IRPCAS Rule 17 (action by stand-on vessel) says “When one of two vessels is to keep out of the way the other shall keep her course and speed”.

The combination of these rules creates an important difference in the rights and obligations of boats rounding a mark.

If two or more boats are approaching a rounding mark, an overtaking boat (IRPCAS 13) must keep out of the way of any boat she is overtaking. However, a boat being overtaken must maintain her course and speed (IRPCAS 17), and must not alter course to round the mark unless she can definitely do so without causing a give-way boat that is keeping out of the way to alter course.

Traffic Separation Schemes (TSS)

Boats racing are required to comply with rule 10 of the IRPCAS, Traffic Separation Schemes (TSS), and boats that break this rule may be penalized by a protest committee. Further, the rules relating to TSSs are enforceable in the courts for all vessels, including boats racing, and heavy fines can be, and frequently are, imposed for non-compliance.

If Traffic Separation Schemes are likely to be significant for an event organizing authorities and race committees are encouraged to ensure that the course set enables competitors to cross or pass through a TSS without major deviations from the course. When it is possible that crossing or passing through a TSS will be incompatible with normal racing, sailing instructions may give limited permission for the use of the engine for propulsion (see RRS 42.3(i)), or (which is perhaps the safest and fairest option) may make all of a TSS a prohibited zone. Boats that gain a significant advantage by such use of an engine break rule 42 and will be disqualified if protested unless the sailing instructions specify a different penalty.

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