



SAFETY INFORMATION NOTICE

No. 3 of 2019

Navigation Lights

Issue:

Concern had been expressed over the utility of lights on offshore yachts as the boats have evolved to become bigger, faster and carry sail plans that can at times obscure the lights. World Sailing's Oceanic and Offshore Committee commissioned a working party to examine navigation lights and their effectiveness.

The working party closely reviewed the requirements of the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGS) and studied the trends in modern offshore yachts. Generally, they found a high degree of compliance in boats when sailing while noting some non-compliances when boats were operating as power-driven vessels (PDVs)

A working paper was produced and is available at "[A Working Paper on the suitability of the rules for lights for modern yachts.](#)" A number of proposals have been forwarded to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for consideration in due course.

Notice:

COLREGS

Part C of COLREGS - Lights and Shapes, specifies what lights vessels are required to exhibit and Annex I contains positioning and technical details of lights and shapes. Most sailors are familiar with the main parts of the regulation. Details of the Annex are not generally as well known or understood and some of the requirements are quite intricate.

The specifications for a sailing vessel are straight forward with little mention in Annex I. One issue that has emerged with bigger boats of 20m or more in length is the restriction on exhibiting lights combined in one lantern at or near the top of the mast (Rule 25(b)). This position is favoured for lights on a modern boat as it is clear of masking sails and prevents lights being reflected by the sails and degrading the crew's look-out. The restriction precludes boats 20m or more in length using tricolour or bicolour fittings. Some boats 20m or more in length are overcoming the issue by using two or three separate fittings at the top of the mast.

The lights for a sailing boat operating as a PDV are more problematic and there are a number of restrictions listed in Annex I. These include:

- the addition of a masthead light and where it can be placed or if less than 12m in length an all-round white light as permitted in Rule 23(d)(i);
- sidelights are to be lower than the masthead light (Annex I, 2(g));



- boats less than 20m in length with sidelights in a combined lantern are to fit the sidelights at least 1m lower than masthead light (Annex I, 2(h));
- boats more than 20m in length shall not place the sidelights forward of the masthead light (Annex I, 3(b));
- boats less than 12m in length using an all-round white light are to exhibit the sidelights at least 1m below the all-round white light (Annex I, 2(d)); and
- different vertical profiles for sailing vessels with an expanded vertical sector 25° above and below the horizontal (Annex I, 10(b)). Sailing vessels are unable to use lights for non-sailing vessels that are marked with a 'Three Bladed Propeller' when certified using EN 14744:2005.

The main consequence is if a boat exhibits sidelights from the top of the mast when sailing, a second set of sidelights will be required lower than the masthead or all-round white light, used when operating as a PDV.

Enhancing Visibility

An issue raised by the working party was the adequacy of the visibility of a modern ocean racer when sailing at speeds up to 30+ knots, displaying only a single red, green or white light, possibly from the top of the mast. Within COLREGS it is permissible to display an all-round flashing white light from the top of the mast to attract attention and warn other vessels of a yacht's presence. In certain situations such as congested waters or shipping lanes this would be a display of good seamanship.

If a boat is fitted with two sets of sidelights and possibly sternlights, one at the top of the mast and one near deck level there may be some situations where it would also be sound seamanship to display both sets of lights at the same time. The aim being to provide warning of the boat to other vessels nearby who may not be looking-out at the height of the mast. Some consider the simultaneous use of two sets of sidelights and sternlights to be in violation of COLREGS. It is permitted for all-round lights (Annex I Section 9(b)(ii)) and routinely done by commercial vessels, such as tugs, when no single set of lights will be visible from all relative bearings. The practice demonstrates good seamanship when appropriate.

Things to Check

As a safety check you should ensure:

- if you are fitted with sidelights at the top of the mast for use when sailing that you have a second set of sidelights below the masthead or all-round light, if permitted, for use when operating as a PDV; and
- all light fittings are certified by an appropriate international or national body as conforming with COLREGS.

You may also wish to consider whether an all-round flashing white light at the top of the mast would be prudent for the type of sailing you are involved with and the waters on which you sail.