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BOATING EDUCATION & SAFETY

by Capt. John L. Annino

Vessel Identification - Part VIII

In our last article, we discussed the many different types of vessels that can be found navigating the waters of our country. We also discussed the order in which we prioritize these vessels with respect to right-of-way.

*A dredge is a special type of RAM. In addition to the Red, White, Red RAM identification lights, it will display 2 green lights in a vertical line on the side where it is safe to pass on, and 2 red lights on the unsafe to pass

VESSEL	DAYSHAPE	IDENT. LIGHT
NUC - Not under Command	2 Black Balls	Red over Red
RAM - Restricted Ability to Maneuver	Ball, Diamond, Ball	Red, White, Red
- Dredge	Special see above *	
- Mine Sweeper	Special see above *	
- Diver Down	Alpha Flag	
CBD - Constrained by Draft	Black Cylinder	Red, Red, Red
FISH - Fishing Vessel	Basket /2 Cones	Red, White
- Trawling Vessel	Basket/2 cones	Green, White
SAIL - Sailing Vessel		Red, Green
PILOT - Pilot Vessel (pilot onboard)		White, Red
At ANCHOR	1 Black Ball	White
AGROUND	3 Black Balls	Red, Red, White

During the daylight hours, identification is fairly easy. As a rule, visual observation will define what you see, however you can be misled. Imagine you are on Long Island sound one afternoon and you spot a fishing vessel. At first appearance it might indicate that he has the right-of-way over you in your recreational sailboat. However, after more careful examination you see that there is nothing identifying the boat as a fishing vessel (commercial boat actively in the collection of seafood). This makes this vessel a regular powerboat, which in turn makes your sailboat the privileged vessel. It is for reasons like this that our "Rules of the Road" provide us with a way to identify different categories of vessels in daytime or at night.

During the daytime a system of 'DAYSHAPES', and at night 'IDENTIFICATION LIGHTS' are used. The following chart should serve as a good reference for vessel identification. Of course, further information can be found in the actual Navigation Rules book or in Chapmans.

Power vessels and seaplanes have no special Identification lights. They use the starboard and port sidelights, stern lights and masthead lights that were discussed in an earlier article.

We should make special note that in Connecticut waters, it is not unusual to see submarines. A submarine is best identified by a yellow (amber) light that flashes a distinct pattern of one flash per second for three seconds and then is off for 3 seconds.

side. During daylight hours, the green lights are replaced by black diamonds and the red lights by black balls. If the dredge has a pipeline attached, it will be lined with flashing yellow lights. Any dip in the pipeline to allow vessel traffic over it will be marked by two adjacent sets of vertical red lights. The place to cross over the pipeline would be between these two sets of lights.

* Another form of RAM is a minesweeper. A very distinct array of three green lights identifies this unusual vessel. The dayshape replaces the lights with black balls. Federal law requires a 1,000-meter security zone around a minesweeper. Positioning of the lights or balls is as follows - visualize a plus sign (+) where the lights and/or balls would be in the North, East, and West positions.

Tug boats towing or pushing barges are required to show a variety of different lights such as multiple masthead lights or different lighting on the stern depending on what waters they are on and how long the tow is. It is best for recreational boaters to keep a safe distance whenever possible. A recognized dayshape for towing or towed vessels would be a black diamond.

My basic rule of thumb to mariners is: "The more it looks like a circus wagon (at night) with lights, or like a floating city during the day - the farther away you should stay."

In our next issue we will cover whistle, fog and maneuvering signals. Until thenSafe Boating