

Sail4All

Rules of The Road

Sailing areas such as Portland Harbour can get very busy with lots of recreational activity, racing and race training, and commercial shipping movements. It is important, therefore, that in company with all users of our water space, dinghy sailors are familiar with the rules for avoiding collisions (the "Rules of The Road"). The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (sometimes abbreviated "COLREGs") are the home of the rules that we must be familiar with. The following rules are particularly relevant to sailing boats:

STARBOARD TACK IS THE STAND-ON VESSEL. A sailing boat on PORT tack must keep clear of a boat on STARBOARD tack. If you are on STARBOARD tack, hold your course but be watchful in case the PORT tack boat has not seen you. Remember, you are on STARBOARD tack if the wind is coming over the right-hand (the "starboard") side of the boat.

WINDWARD BOAT KEEPS CLEAR. When sailing boats are on the same tack, the boat to windward must keep clear. If you are the boat to leeward, hold your course but be watchful in case the windward boat has not seen you.

OVERTAKING BOAT KEEPS CLEAR. If you are overtaking another boat you must keep clear, even if you are sailing past a power vessel. If you are the vessel being overtaken, hold your course but be watchful in case the overtaking boat has not seen you.

POWER GIVES WAY TO SAIL. A boat under power must keep clear of a sailing vessel. However, beware! It is unrealistic to expect a large powered vessel, possibly constrained by her draft or ability to manoeuvre, to give way to a small sailing dinghy - in many cases it is the smaller vessel's duty to give way. Be vigilant, use your common sense and, if necessary, take early and clear avoiding action.

Watch this useful video which explains the [Rules of The Road](#) as they apply to vessels under sail.

It is worth remembering that the racing rules are based largely upon COLREGs, but differ in some important matters such as overtaking and right of way close to turning marks.

Top Tip. It is the responsibility of every master of a vessel to avoid collisions. Even if you are the stand-on vessel, be vigilant and, if necessary, take early and clear avoiding action.