

COLREGs Rule 6

Safe Speed



Every vessel shall at all times proceed at a safe speed so that she can take proper and effective action to avoid collision and be stopped within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions.

In determining a safe speed the following factors shall be among those taken into account:

- (a) By all vessels:
 - (i) the state of visibility;
 - (ii) the traffic density including concentrations of fishing vessels or any other vessels;
 - (iii) the manoeuvrability of the vessel with special reference to stopping distance and turning ability in the prevailing conditions;
 - (iv) at night the presence of background light such as from shore lights or from back scatter of her own lights;
 - (v) the state of wind, sea and current, and the proximity of navigational hazards;
 - (vi) the draught in relation to the available depth of water.
- (b) Additionally, by vessels with operational radar:
 - (i) the characteristics, efficiency and limitations of the radar equipment;
 - (ii) any constraints imposed by the radar range scale in use;
 - (iii) the effect on radar detection of the sea state, weather and other sources of interference;
 - (iv) the possibility that small vessels, ice and other floating objects may not be detected by radar at an adequate range;
 - (v) the number, location and movement of vessels detected by radar;
 - (vi) the more exact assessment of the visibility that may be possible when radar is used to determine the range of vessels or other objects in the vicinity.

Check Your Speed

Rule 6 requires you to **make your own judgement** on the appropriate speed for your vessel, taking into account the situation you are in and the situation you are moving towards. Excessive speed contributes to many collisions.

Rule 5 on look-out and Rule 6 are closely linked. If you do not obey Rule 5, then you cannot obey Rule 6.

Generally a **'safe speed' is a reduced speed**, because:

- In most cases, if either ship reduces speed, their closest point of approach (CPA) will increase. The risk of collision will then reduce.
- It gives you more time to think and to act. Time to think and to act is all important – too much speed and too little time can fatally impair your risk assessment processes.
- It allows you to stop more effectively.
- If a collision does occur, the resulting damage will be a lot less.

Remember:

- You are responsible for proceeding at a safe speed. If an alteration of speed is necessary, then you do not have to ask permission.
- Radar and ARPA are not infallible. They may miss some targets altogether or they may show large targets as weak echoes.
- Navigational aids such as ECDIS and GPS can be equally suspect. Never rely on one instrument or on one technique – always cross-check.
- Constantly monitor your speed – the situation at sea is always changing and a safe speed in one situation can be too fast in another. Situations can change suddenly. Maintaining a high speed for commercial reasons is no excuse and no defence for proceeding at an unsafe speed.

Summary

Always travel at a safe speed.

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