

Operating your Boat at Night

With the popularity of night time fishing, there are many additional concerns regarding safety on the water at night. Be sure all of your safety gear including your running lights are fully functional, and your signaling equipment especially your flashlight and flares are in good order.

Visibility and disorientation are the major factors concerning operation at night - watching for other vessels can be very difficult (remember - you **MUST** keep a watch, at all times, by sight and sound). Can you see other vessels and any objects in the water? Even vessels with running lights are difficult to spot against a lighted shoreline. Control your speed, slow down to allow extra time to avoid situations. Judging distance is much more difficult at night or in any circumstance of poor visibility.

Be sure you know the Collision Regulations (Rules of the road) based on the red, green and white running lights you may see on the water. These lights will tell you the type of vessel and how it is approaching you or how you are approaching it. This will determine your action even though you cannot see the vessel. **If anchored**, use your anchor light (white light 360°), **NOT** your running lights.

If you or a passenger fell into the water, can they be located quickly? Darkness can make this extremely difficult. Consider including such devices as a light, light sticks or quick flashing (strobe) light and waterproof whistles and attaching these to all your life jackets. And of course, wear your life saving device.

Protect your night vision - bright lights aboard your vessel will reduce your ability to see at night. Usually it is best to dim all lights aboard and use the natural light of the night (moon, stars etc.) to navigate. It can take up to a half hour for your night vision to adjust. Boats do not use headlights to operate at night. If your vessel is equipped with forward facing lights at the bow, these are docking lights, and should only be used for that purpose.

Using a search light will assist in picking out the reflective markings on buoys and beacons, but do not shine a search light on another vessel as you will reduce their night vision. Search lights are not intended to be used to navigate, the narrow field of vision available in a search light beam is not usually adequate to navigate safely. A compass or electronic navigation gear is designed for this purpose. Do you have the equipment and do you know how to use it? At night, when you cannot see familiar landmarks, this equipment along with the appropriate charts are invaluable.

If you become lost or disabled, run aground, or are involved in a collision you will be much harder to locate in the darkness. Distress signals, unless you carry flares, are much more difficult to see, and there are fewer vessels out on the water to assist you. Plan your distress signals with darkness in mind, consider VHF radio equipment and file a float plan so someone will come looking for you.

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