



Marine Notice No. 30 of 2023

Notice to all Masters, Owners, Boating Clubs, Yachtspersons, Seafarers and Users of Pleasure and Recreational Craft

This Marine Notice replaces Marine Notice No. 9 of 2003

Application of SOLAS Chapter V to Recreational Craft

Further to [Marine Notice No. 19 of 2021](#), “Importance of Voyage Planning and avoiding dangerous situations in Adverse Weather and Sea Conditions”, the Department of Transport wishes to highlight again the provisions of Chapter V (Safety of Navigation) of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea 1974 (SOLAS) that apply to small, privately owned recreational craft.

1. Voyage/Passage Planning

Although regulation 34 of Chapter V, “Safe navigation and avoidance of dangerous situations”, only applies when proceeding to sea, the department advises all recreational craft users to comply with the voyage planning principles.

Recreational craft users should particularly consider the following points when planning a boating trip:

- **Weather:** before going boating, check the weather forecast and get regular updates if planning to be out for any length of time.
- **Tides:** check the tidal predictions for the trip and ensure that they fit with the planned trip.
- **Limitations of the vessel:** consider whether the boat is suitable for the proposed trip and that there is sufficient safety equipment and stores on board.
- **Crew:** take into account the experience and physical ability of the crew. Crews may be impacted by the cold, tiredness and seasickness and this could result in an overburdened skipper.
- **Navigational Dangers:** make sure the crew is familiar with any navigational dangers that may be encountered during the boating trip. This generally means checking an up-to-date chart and a current pilot book or almanac.
- **Contingency plan:** always have a contingency plan should anything go wrong. Before departing, consider places where the boat can take refuge should conditions deteriorate or if the crew suffer an incident or injury. Bear in mind that the GPS set is vulnerable and could fail at the most inconvenient time. It is sensible and good

practice to make sure that the crew are not over-reliant on the GPS set and that they can navigate to safety by using alternative means such as headlands and landmarks should it fail.

- **Information ashore:** make sure that someone ashore knows the plans for the trip and knows what to do should they become concerned for the crews' wellbeing. Ensure a designated person/organisation ashore is aware of the intended voyage, departure and return times, and has a procedure in place to raise the alarm if the need arises.
- **Communication:** make sure to have reliable means of communication in the event of an emergency while at sea or on inland waters. See [Marine Notice No. 40 of 2019](#)¹ for further information or visit the department's website at www.gov.ie/transport and search for 'Marine Notices'.

The department recommends that all operators pass **Traffic Report messages** via the nearest Coast Guard Radio Station. [Marine Notice No. 61 of 2020](#) provides information regarding Irish Coast Guard VHF working channels. There is no charge for this service. Please note, however, that overdue reporting remains the responsibility of the vessel's shore contact. The Irish Coast Guard will not initiate overdue procedures on the basis of Traffic Report messages.

2. Radar Reflectors

Many large ships rely on radar for navigation and for spotting other vessels in their vicinity. Therefore, whatever size a boat is, it's important to make sure that it can be seen by radar. Many small boats, especially those made of Glass Reinforced Plastic (also commonly termed 'Fibreglass') will return a very weak echo to radar, if any. Regulation 19 of Chapter V requires all small craft to fit a radar reflector 'if practicable'. If the boat is more than 15m in length, it should be possible to fit a radar reflector that meets the IMO requirements. If the boat is less than 15m in length, it should be fitted with the largest radar reflector possible. Regardless of the size of boat, the radar reflector should be fitted according to the manufacturer's instructions and as high as possible to maximise its effectiveness.

3. Life Saving Signals

Regulation 29 of Chapter V requires the boat to have access to an illustrated table of the recognised life saving signals, so that it can communicate with the search and rescue services or other boats if it gets into trouble. This is also a legal requirement under the Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Nautical Charts and Publications) Regulations 2021 ([S.I. No. 149/2021](#)). A Table of Life Saving Signals is available on page 142 of the Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft and can also be found in various nautical publications.

4. Assistance to other Craft

Regulations 31, 32 and 33 of Chapter V require a vessel:

¹ Marine Notices are information notices issued by the Department of Transport from time to time to publicise important safety, regulatory and other information relating to the marine sector in Ireland. The Marine Notices are available on the department's webpage at www.gov.ie/transport and are circulated by email to those who are included on an email circulation list. If you wish to be added to the Marine Notice email circulation list, please send a request to: marinenotices@transport.gov.ie.

- to let the Irish Coast Guard and any other vessels in the vicinity know if it encounters anything that could cause a serious hazard to navigation if that hazard has not already been reported. This can be done by calling the Coast Guard on VHF, if on board, or by telephoning them at the earliest opportunity. The Coast Guard will then warn other vessels in the area. As mentioned at section 1 above, information on the Irish Coast Guard VHF channels can be found in [Marine Notice No. 61 of 2020](#);
- to respond to any distress signal that it sees or hears and help anyone or any boat in distress as best it can.

5. Misuse of Distress Signals

Regulation 35 of Chapter V prohibits misuse of any distress signals. These are critical to safety at sea and misusing them could put a person's life at risk.

6. Other Conventions

In addition to SOLAS Chapter V, recreational craft users should note that the International Convention for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs) applies and therefore they should ensure that the correct lights and shapes are carried. The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) also applies. Vessels should not discharge oil or drop garbage into the sea and vessels over 12m should display a placard. Vessels of 13.7m in length are required to meet certain life saving and fire protection requirements.

7. Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft

The importance of voyage planning is outlined in Chapter 2.2 of the Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft. Attention is also drawn to Appendix 6 of the Code of Practice, which contains information on Weather, Sea States and Tides, and Appendix 8, where an example of a Voyage/Passage Planning Template can be found. It is essential to carry out regular weather forecast checks during coastal, offshore and ocean voyages.

The Code of Practice is a free document and hardcopies can be obtained on request, in both English and Irish, from the Maritime Safety Policy Division of the Department at email MarineLeisureSafety@transport.gov.ie. The Code is also available to view or download from the department's website at the following link: [Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft](#), or by visiting the department's website www.gov.ie/transport and searching "Publications" for "Recreational Craft Code".

All recreational craft users are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Code of Practice and to heed the safety advice and recommendations. Safety information and advice is also available on the department's "Safety on the Water" website (www.safetyonthewater.ie) and at the following link: [Safety on the Water](#).

Note: Marine Notices are issued purely for maritime safety and navigation reasons and should not be construed as conferring rights or granting permissions.

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For any technical assistance in relation to this Marine Notice, please contact:
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