

Big Ships Little Boats

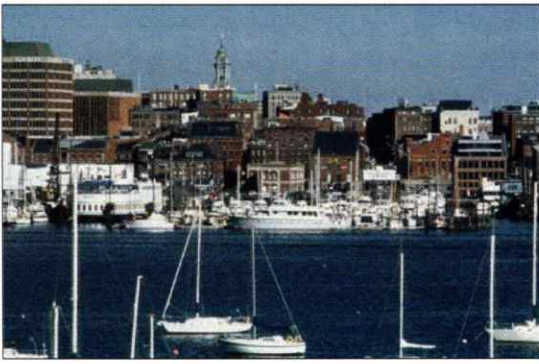
Better Understanding for
Safer Boating In Portland Harbor
and Casco Bay



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Portland Harbor: Portland is home to thousands of recreational boats sharing the coastal waters with commercial vessels and fishing boats. Portland's deep draft channels are used by ocean-going vessels as well as large tug and barge units. With these vessels sharing these waters, it is very important to be aware of local traffic patterns and navigational procedures to help ensure your safety and enjoyment. The number of recreational boats has increased over time, multiplying the chances for collision with large ships. Big ships must keep to the narrow channels. **Rule 9** of the Navigation Rules specifically states that small craft, or a sailing vessel, "**shall not impede the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway.**" If recreational and commercial operators are on the same page we will all enjoy a safer harbor.

What Can You Do?

1. Keep a constant lookout, astern as well as forward, and be aware of your relation to all boats, buoys or other features. Pilots call this "situational awareness."

2. Stay out of the way. Avoid sailing or motoring in ship channels, especially if visibility is poor because of fog, rain or darkness. Big ships must stay in the deep channels. Most small vessels don't need to. No matter how fast your boat is, it is best to pass well astern of a ship or barge. Remember, no boat has ever been sunk by passing behind a moving ship.

3. Don't underestimate the speed of a large vessel. If your boat is slow, a sailboat for example, you might not be able to take effective evasive action if you find yourself on a collision course with a large ship in visibility of a quarter-mile or less - the speed differential is simply too great.

4. Be visible. At night, make sure that your navigation lights are bright and are not obscured by sails, flags or dinghies. If you see the running lights of a vessel and you don't think you have been seen, begin to get out of the way. Light sails with a spot-light to indicate your position. Carry a radar reflector as high on the boat as you can.

5. Keep watch at night. Even on a clear night you will have difficulty seeing a big ship approach. You might see it first as a black shadow against a background of shore lights, or as a shadow moving rapidly across still water - at that point you are not far apart. Remember that your lights will not be easily spotted from the ship.

6. Watch the ship's lights. Pay attention to the sidelights, masthead and range lights. On a large ship the white range lights, with the aft light higher than the forward light, will help you determine the ship's direction. If you see both red and green sidelights, you're dead ahead - MOVE OUT FAST. Learn to recognize mast lights of a tug towing barges and of a commercial fishing vessel towing a net.

7. Know whistle signals. Use only when vessels are in sight of one another. The pilot of a ship will frequently not use the "port" or "starboard" whistle signals when passing small boats because he is afraid the signals will not be understood and might lead to erratic changes in course. If you hear five or more short blasts on the whistle, it is the "danger" signal. Check and see if it is for you - and if it is, make way fast.

8. Use your radio. Remember that while channel 16 is the *calling and distress frequency*, channel 13 is the *working frequency* used to arrange safe meeting and passing between ships and other watercraft. If you hail a ship, identify yourself relative to a buoy or some other reference point. Do not use these channels for chatter. Use a working channel.

9. Choose safe anchorages. Never anchor or hove to in a shipping channel, and never tie up to a channel marker or buoy.

10. Use binoculars. Get into the habit of sweeping the horizon 360 degrees at least every fifteen minutes, more frequently in poor conditions.

11. Carry a radar reflector. A radar reflector will improve your chances of being seen.

12. Remember that ships displace many thousands of tons of water, creating surges and wakes, which may be amplified in shallow water in proximity to land.

Some Facts You Should Know

1. In general, most large ships travel at a "maneuvering speed" of about 5 to 8 knots while in the harbor, but in open waters they may be going faster.

2. Ships often travel faster than you might expect given their size, and they must maintain adequate speed to maintain steerage and maneuverability. In low visibility, ships navigate by radar, and small craft may or may not be detected.

3. Lightly loaded vessels must keep a fair speed to stay under control when in channels. The same is true of loaded vessels that are unevenly trimmed. If they slow down too much or stop, they risk being driven aground by wind or tide.

4. It often takes less than 10 minutes for a fast ship to reach you once you spot it in clear weather, and in hazy weather it takes a lot less. At 10 knots, a ship goes 1 nautical mile in 6 minutes; at 15 knots, from a mile away, it can be on you in 4 minutes.

5. Large, difficult-to-maneuver ships cannot successfully avoid smaller craft in narrow channels. It is up to you to stay clear.

6. Be aware that the "channel" is not always clearly defined, especially in long, open stretches.

7. A large ship, which is slowing down, does not steer very well. Steer clear.

8. When the ship's engines are put "full astern," there is not much more the pilot can do, and he/she may lose steerage. In many cases the reversing action will swing the ship's bow to starboard, but precisely how a ship will react when its engines go into reverse will vary. Therefore, stay well away. Remember, depending on draft and load, it may take a ship a mile or more to stop, after its engines are reversed.

9. Other, smaller vessels that operate throughout the harbor can also cause problems. Watch out for tugs towing barges, especially at night, when poorly lit barges may remain invisible. Remember that a partially submerged towing cable can cut a boat in two. Commercial fishing vessels, though more maneuverable, may pose a problem when hauling tackle or large nets, which may be deceptively long.



Deep Draft Vessels: They need room to maneuver. A vessel at anchor does not mean that it is stationary. Large vessels will move under the influence of wind, current, or an assisting tug that may not be visible. Use caution when in the vicinity of anchored vessels. Large vessels going under or through a bridge must "set up" their approach well before they pass through the bridge and cannot maneuver during the approach to the bridge opening. Stay clear during this process. Tankers, while at a berth, are surrounded by floating booms. Once again...keep clear!



Visibility: Are you visible? Due to the design of many large commercial vessels, it can be very difficult for them to see small boats, especially when they are at the bow or close aboard. Always assume that the larger vessel has not seen you. Use caution, and practice safe navigation. Use extra caution when operating at night or in restricted visibility.



Emergency Response Vessels: Blue lights and sirens demand attention! U. S. Coast Guard, Harbor Master, Marine Patrol, Fire Department, and other law enforcement agencies' vessels, all display blue lights and use sirens when responding to an emergency. Be sure to give way and not impede them in the course of their duties...it's the law!



Tugs & Tows: What's behind that tug? A conservative approach is to assume that a tug and barge are connected by a towline. Never attempt to pass between a tug and barge. Stay clear while a tug shifts its tow, from astern to a side or end tie. Always give a working tug a wide berth! Watch its wake!

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- *Portland Pilots Inc.*
- *Portland Docking Pilots Inc.*
- *South Portland Lions Club*
- *The Portland Propeller Club*
- *Portland Pipeline Corp.*
- *Gulf Oil Corp.*
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- *Centerboard Yacht Club*
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