

Steering and Sailing Rules

Rule 9

Narrow Channels

(a) A vessel proceeding along the course of a narrow channel or fairway shall keep as near to the outer limit of the channel or fairway which lies on her starboard side as is safe and practicable.

Notes on Rule 9

- The terms of "narrow channel" and "fairway" are used repeatedly but not defined. A "channel" is a natural or dredged lane that is lined by shallow water. A "fairway" is generally open water where the water on either side is slightly more shallow on either side.
- Both rules state that vessels should proceed through narrow channels or fairways as close as possible to the starboard side that is "safe and practicable".
- Vessels in INLAND waters of the "Great Lakes, Western Rivers, or waters specified by the Secretary" will give the vessels "proceeding downbound" with a "following current" have the right-of-way over upbound vessels.
- Vessels less than 20 meters in length or sailing vessels shall not impede any other vessel navigating within a narrow channel or fairway.
- Vessels in a narrow channel have the right-of-way over crossing vessels.
- INTERNATIONAL and INLAND require the overtaken vessel in a narrow channel or fairway to be in agreement and "take steps to permit safe passing". The sound signals for BOTH will be different (see Rule 34).
- Overtaking vessels are the give-way vessels (see Rule 13).
- No anchoring in a narrow channel unless "circumstances" force you to.

Inland

(ii) Notwithstanding Rule 9(a)(i) and Rule 14(a), a power-driven vessel operating in narrow channel or fairway on the Great Lakes, Western Rivers, or waters specified by the Secretary, and proceeding downbound with a following current shall have the right-of-way over an upbound vessel, shall propose the manner and place of passage, and shall initiate the maneuvering signals prescribed by Rule 34(a)(i), as appropriate. The vessel proceeding upbound against the current shall hold as necessary to permit safe passing.

(b) A vessel of less than 20 meters in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway.

(c) A vessel engaged in fishing shall not impede the passage of any other vessel navigating within a narrow channel or fairway.

(d) A vessel shall not cross a narrow channel or fairway if such crossing impedes the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within such channel or fairway. The latter vessel may use the sound signal prescribed in Rule 34(d) if in doubt as to the intention of the crossing vessel.

International

(e)(i) In a narrow channel or fairway when overtaking can take place only if the vessel to be overtaken has to take action to permit safe passing, the vessel intending to overtake shall indicate her intention by sounding the appropriate signal prescribed in Rule 34(c)(i). The vessel to be overtaken shall, if in agreement, sound the appropriate signal prescribed in Rule 34(c)(i) and take steps to permit safe passing. If in doubt she may sound the signals prescribed in Rule 34(d).

Inland

(e)(i) In a narrow channel or fairway when overtaking, the power-driven vessel intending to overtake another power-driven vessel shall indicate her intention by sounding the appropriate signal prescribed in Rule 34(c)(i) and take steps to permit safe passing. The power-driven vessel being overtaken, if in agreement, shall sound the same signal prescribed in Rule 34(c)(i) and if specifically agreed to, take steps to permit safe passing. If in doubt she shall sound the signal prescribed in Rule 34(d).

(f) A vessel nearing a bend or an area of a narrow channel or fairway where other vessels may be obscured by an intervening obstruction shall navigate with particular alertness and caution and shall sound the appropriate signal prescribed in Rule 34(e).

(g) Any vessel shall, if the circumstances of the case admit, avoid anchoring in a narrow channel.