



Making and filing sail plans

A sail plan is a voyage itinerary that includes a travel route and a basic description of your boat. Sail plans are also referred to as trip or float plans. No matter what you call them, all boaters are encouraged to file one before heading out even if it is just for an hour or two.

File your sail plan with a responsible person and instruct them to contact a Rescue Coordination Centre, (see page 67 for telephone numbers) if you are overdue.

If you are taking a long trip you should file a daily position report (especially if your planned route has

changed). To avoid launching an unwarranted search for you, be sure to deactivate the sail plan you filed by reporting that you have returned or completed your trip. Forgetting to do this can result in lost time and resources for Search and Rescue personnel. See page 61 for a sail plan you can photocopy and use.

Avoiding specific hazards

Being prepared goes beyond having your boat and equipment in tip-top shape. Follow these tips:

- Check marine charts for overhead obstacles, bridges or underwater cables you may encounter in the area you will be navigating.
- Read marine charts with related publications like Sailing Directions. Looking at tide tables and current atlases will also help. They may indicate water levels, times of low, slack and high tides and the direction of water flow.
- Stay away from designated swimming areas. Even canoes and kayaks can easily injure swimmers.
- Avoid operating close to shore and look out for diving flags, especially on days when the sun's glare is strong. Diving or snorkelling operations could be taking place beneath you.

Talk to knowledgeable local residents if you are in an area that is not covered by marine charts. They may be able to point out low-head dams, rapids, white water, local wind conditions, currents and areas of rapid build up of high wave conditions.



Monitoring the weather

Understanding weather and water conditions is very important. Operators should seek out current, relevant information before heading out and know how to get updates while on the water. This requires the knowledge and skill to use a marine radio. A receiver for continuous marine weather forecasts is available and distributed through marine equipment supply outlets.

When heading out, make sure the conditions you see match those predicted. Once under way, remember to keep your eye on the sky. If the sky looks dark and cloudy and conditions are changing rapidly, head for shore (check your charts in advance to know where to seek shelter).

Summer thunderstorms can strike quickly and unexpectedly. Other indicators bad weather is approaching are falling barometric pressure, increasing winds and changes in wind direction that can affect wave action. See page 68 for ways to obtain marine weather forecasts.

Environment Canada uses special wind terms in marine weather forecasts:

- Light wind (10 knots* or less)
- Moderate wind (11–21 knots)
- Strong wind (22–33 knots)
- Gales (34–47 knots)
- Storm force wind (48–63 knots)
- Hurricane (64 knots or more)

* One knot is one nautical mile an hour (1.852 km/h)



Using nautical charts

An open body of water may seem spacious and accommodating, but remember there are no defined pathways for travelling on water. In fact, it is the absence of defined pathways, as well as signage to clearly tell us where we are, that makes navigation difficult. Operators should know:

- How to use a compass along with marine charts
- How to plot a course
- Positioning methods

- How to use electronic navigation equipment
- Navigational references such as tide tables; the Canadian buoyage system, navigation lights and signals, Notices to Mariners, and Sailing Directions

Small boats should avoid potential danger and steer clear of rapids, currents and commercial shipping channels.

The Canadian Coast Guard publishes monthly Notices to Mariners that have important information and amendments to marine charts and publications. These notices are free and can be obtained at

www.notmar.com. Obtain as much information as possible about the area you will be navigating before you go.

The Canadian Hydrographic Service is the top source for information on nautical charts, tide and current tables, Sailing Directions, the Canadian Aids to Navigation System, Radio Aids to Marine Navigation, the List of Lights and Buoys and Fog Signals. Visit www.charts.gc.ca for more information.



Emergency! What are you going to do?

Act smart and call early! Knowing how to communicate distress messages and seek assistance in an emergency can make the difference between life and death.

Marine radio communications

Regulated marine distress and safety communication equipment such as:



- marine VHF radios (with the new digital selective calling (DSC) option, channel 70)
- marine MF/HF – DSC radios
- Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs)
- NAVTEX
- Inmarsat

work together to form the new international system known as the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS). This combination of equipment quickly relays distress alerts to the Coast Guard and other vessels in the immediate vicinity.

Pleasure craft do not have to carry GMDSS-compatible equipment, but it is recommended. If your pleasure craft has this equipment, connect it to a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver to ensure your exact location is automatically transmitted in a digital distress alert in an emergency.

Marine VHF radio and GPS

Marine VHF radio is generally the most effective and reliable means of issuing a distress alert. If you have a VHF radio keep it tuned to channel 16. Know where you are at all times and be prepared to describe your specific location.



If you are buying a new VHF radio, make sure it has the new digital selective calling (DSC) feature on channel 70. This feature provides automatic digital distress alerts. The Canadian Coast Guard has upgraded its facilities to provide DSC channel 70 service in many areas.

Remember, VHF radio channel 16 is used for emergency and calling purposes only. Once you call another vessel on channel 16, take your conversation to a working frequency to continue. VHF channel 70 should be used only for DSC (digital) communication and not for voice communications. Anyone who uses a VHF radio must follow the procedures described in the VHF Radiotelephone Practices and Procedures Regulations.