

COLREGS



RULE 5: LOOK-OUT

Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.

KEEP A LOOK-OUT

Between them, Rule 2 on responsibility and Rule 5 are the most important of all the COLREGS.

Rule 5 is short but it has two vital elements.

- You must **pay attention to everything** – not just looking ahead out of the bridge windows but looking all around the vessel, using all your senses and all personnel and equipment available to you. There must always be someone looking-out. If weather or the situation around you causes concern, then more lookouts may be needed and you must call them without hesitation.
- You must use all of that information continuously to assess the situation your vessel is in and the **risk of collision**.

The requirement to 'maintain a proper lookout' includes:

- Looking and listening – maintain a continuous watch by sight and by hearing, both inside and outside the wheelhouse.
- Looking means looking out of the windows, **all the time**.
- Using ECDIS – the prime function of ECDIS is to help you be sure that your ship is not moving into danger. Its other functions are useful but you must not get distracted by them.
- Using ARPA – you must be aware of the effects of clutter, of small targets and the range and limitations of the set.
- Using a radio – you must listen to what is going on around you but you must always think carefully before calling other ships on VHF. It always takes more time than you think and it may cause delay and confusion.
- Monitoring sound signals – ensure you can hear what is going on outside the wheelhouse. Be aware of the effect of keeping a closed wheelhouse and of distracting noises inside it.
- Using a depth indicator – frequently and systematically monitor the depth of water beneath your keel. The seabed is often the nearest point of danger.
- Avoid distractions such as wheelhouse and deck lights, other people, navigational records and routine paperwork, including chart corrections.
- Always remember that you are on bridge watch to keep the ship safe, as set out in Rule 2 on responsibility.

To assess the risk of collision you must continuously ask yourself:

- Is a collision possible, because of the action (or inaction) of any vessel in the vicinity – including your own vessel?
- Is a collision probable? If so, the risk of collision is already here and you need to act urgently. See also Rule 7 on risk of collision.

SUMMARY

Always keep a proper look out.