

Newspaper Article 12: Navigation Lights

In the evening of July 5, Lincoln and McCormick counties put on another Thunder over Thurmond fireworks show. It was spectacular, as usual, and I'm sure the one at Little River was also.

The event went well into a very dark evening, and there were hundreds of boats vying for a limited anchoring/drift area. Let me say up front that I was very pleased with the conduct of most recreational boaters during the Thunder event. Very few speeders and most captains exhibited caution and courtesy.

The main issue I observed was the confusion of boats lights after dark. At night boats' lighting provides the main signals to help avoid a collision.

The Navigation Rules state that the length of a boat determines what lighting is required. Most of our boats are less than 39.4 feet and, thus, require a red and green sidelight, usually located on the bow, and an all-around white light at the stern.

These sidelights are visible to another boat approaching from the side or head-on. The red light indicates a boat's port (left) side and the green indicates a boat's starboard (right) side.

This system tells what direction the other boat is moving in relation to us.

With a boat coming directly toward us, we see both a red and green light with a white light usually in the center and higher.

If we see only a white light, it means the other boat is ahead of us and proceeding on about the same course.

The side view that shows us a red light with a white one to its right means the boat is crossing our path from right to left.

If we see a green light with the white one to its left, it means the boat is crossing our path from left to right.

These lights are usually operated by a switch at the helm station and easily used by the crew member driving the boat. Most switches are what we call a 'rocker switch'. The switch is marked Nav on one side and Anchor on the other.

When it is centered, all lights are off.

When rocked to the nav side, it turns on the sidelights and the all-around white stern light.

When rocked to the anchor side, it turns on the white stern all-around light as an anchor light.

Your navigational lighting, or anchor light, needs to be turned on from sunset to sunrise or in conditions of limited visibility. It was heartening to see most boaters turn their lights on at dusk!

When your boat is not anchored, aground or otherwise attached to land, you must have all three navigation lights operating. When you are just drifting, you are still underway and must have these lights lit. When you are anchored, then ONLY the anchor light should be on.

Now here is where it got really messy at "Thunder". Many anchored boats had their navigation lights on even when at anchor. This made it very difficult to tell what these boats at anchor or underway. Their lights told me they were not anchored and, believe me, they were.

The other lighting problem that occurred with only a few boaters was they had their 'docking' lights on while at anchor and even underway. These bright, headlight- type lights, which should only be used when docking, tend to blind all approaching boaters. It's definitely a no- no!