

## Newspaper Article 17: Signals

There are several types of signals we boaters may use to inform other boaters of danger or our intentions. Some of the signals are sound, some are visual and one just involves the waving of arms.

The waving of arms is probably the best daytime distress signal available. Stand facing the other boat/s with your feet a couple of feet apart. Slowly raise and lower your arms. Slowly, because if you do it fast the other boater may think you are just waving. This maneuver is enhanced if you are wearing a life jacket and wave one in each hand. Hard to imagine that wouldn't get attention.

Sound signals may be produced by a horn, whistle, or bell that is audible for one-half mile. Boats less than 65.6 ft. MUST have aboard a sound-producing device – that works! That includes most of us – including PWCs. Larger boats must have a bell in addition to the whistle.

There are two lengths of sounds: A short blast of one or two seconds and a prolonged blast of four to six seconds.

We give sound signals to tell the other boat/s our intention. If what we want to do is okay with the other boat, that boat responds with the same signal. If our intent is not okay, the other boat signals with five short blasts indicating there is doubt on their part or an actual danger. This five short blast signal, in any situation, indicates doubt or danger

To tell another boat which way we will be turning, we give one short blast if we will be turning to the right (starboard) and two short blasts if we are turning to the left (port). So, if we are passing another boat on its right side, what would be our signal? The answer is: one short blast as we are turning our boat to the right.

Another warning blast can be used to alert other boaters of potential danger. For instance, coming around a bend that blinds us to oncoming boats, we would signal with one prolonged blast. Any other boat meeting us would answer with the same signal. Now both of us are forewarned.

More sound signal examples:

When underway in a power boat in the fog, the signal is one prolonged blast every two minutes. For a sail boat, the signal would be one prolonged blast followed by two short blasts every two minutes.

When moving astern (that's backing up), the signal is three short blasts.

Visual Distress Signals (VDS) include flares, lights and flags. Flags are rarely used anymore, except for diving operations, so let's just deal with the others.

A package of three, handheld, red flares satisfies the Coast Guard's rules, although there are also gun-launched rockets, orange smoke and parachute flares. The package of three is inexpensive, but the flares do have a legal shelf life that is printed on the package. You do not have to dispose of the flares once that date is reached; they will still probably work, but you do need to have current flares. Since our lake is classified as "inland waters", flares are not, technically, a legal requirement but an excellent choice nevertheless.

Flares are an excellent means of signaling distress, both day and night, but they are of some danger, so read the instructions.

The standard distress signal in Morse code (SOS) is three dots – three dashes – three dots. This can be done with an ordinary flashlight by doing three quick flashes, then three longer flashes followed by three quick flashes. There are special flashlights that will do that automatically.