

VOYAGE PLANNING



A VOYAGE PLAN IS REQUIRED BY LAW

There was a significant change when the latest Safety of Life at Sea convention came into force; these laws now extend down to cover pleasure craft of less than 150 tons.

SOLAS Regulation 34 says:

1. Prior to proceeding to sea, the master shall ensure that the intended voyage has been planned using the appropriate nautical charts and publications for the area concerned, taking into account the guidelines and recommendations developed by the Organization (IMO).
2. The voyage plan shall identify a route which:
 - ensures sufficient sea room and safe passage
 - accounts for all known navigation hazards and adverse weather conditions
 - avoids actions which could cause damage to the environment and respects all protection measures

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SOLAS Regulation 34 continued:

3. The owner, the charterer, or the company operating the ship shall not prevent or restrict the Master of the ship from taking or executing any decision which is necessary for safe navigation and protection of the marine environment.

These IMO guidelines are aimed at larger vessels, but a small craft passage plan should include:

- an accurate and up to date Weather Forecast
- tidal predictions
- consideration of any limitations of the vessel and crew
- an escape or backup plan
- a float plan left with a responsible party ashore

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FIVE FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHILE PLANNING YOUR VOYAGE:

1. **Objective:** why are you getting underway? Sunset cruise or ocean delivery?
2. **Constraints:** any limitations on your voyage; sunrise/sunset, tides and current, fuel, crew size, time deadline, provisions, etc...
3. **Hazards:** weather, visibility, rocks and shallows, TSS, special operations...
4. **Aids:** anything that will help achieve your objective; GPS, charts, navigation marks, landmarks...
5. **Route:** a plan that achieves your objective while avoiding hazards and allowing for any constraints, including enough aids to be practical.



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It is important that you let the process of planning the voyage dictate the route, not the other way around!

It can be a trap to decide where to go and how to get there first, and then plan the trip around that framework.

Your plan is not required to be written, but even simple trips are complex enough to warrant some quick notes and an established route.

“What are you going to say in court?”

If there is an incident on your voyage that requires an investigation (damage, injury, loss of life or equipment), it will be difficult to convince the courts that you had a voyage plan if you have no details.



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FILE A FLOAT PLAN

- Perhaps the most important part of Voyage Planning
- Tell someone you trust where you are going, who you are with, when will you be back.
- Empower and encourage that person to take action if they do not hear from you! "If you do not hear from us by Sunday, contact the Coast Guard in Newport."
- Make sure to keep up your end of the communication
- A text message may be sufficient: "I'm going fishing with Greg, we are launching out of Point Judith and intend to go to Block Island or possibly Montauk. I should be home around 1100."