

BE SAFE - BE SEEN!

2010

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LIGHTING & OTHER SAFETY TIPS FOR SMALL LEISURE CRAFT



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WHAT DOES NOT WORK?

- **Head Torches** – the movement of your head ensures it can not be seen from all directions
- Using **only one light** – unless it is on a pole that is higher than your head
- Lights with **Low Batteries** – a failing or weak light is worse than nothing as it can give you a false sense of security
- **Going Solo** – the more people there are in a tight group the more likely you are to be spotted
- **Dark Clothing** – a black wetsuit or compression top may well be warm but it can also make you invisible to other traffic

WHAT WORKS?

Rowing Boats - Lights mounted in the number plate slot on the bow and atop the rudder yoke in the stern. If mounting the light directly onto the hull ensure that it is not hidden by the saxboards. Lights can also be mounted on a pole on the stern behind the cox or in the bow in front of a steersman – although care must be taken to conserve night vision with this system. LED sticks on the back of the cox or bowman are also a useful, although only as an addition to the main lighting system.

Canoes/Kayaks – Even with short kayaks lights need to be placed fore and aft to ensure all-around visibility. Lights should be placed high enough above the waterline to ensure they can not be hidden by waves – the front and back of a lifejacket is a good option. Groups should arrange lights for maximum impact i.e. lights on different kayaks shining fore and aft and on opposite shoulders. A tight cluster of boats is more visible than a group line astern (a beef burger shape rather than a sausage), this is especially important when crossing the river

FLASHING LIGHTS

Flashing lights are more noticeable than fixed lights, especially in areas with pools of ambient light such as central London. As such their use is recommended, but with the following provisos:

- Upstream of **Putney Bridge** only the bow light should flash, allowing other river users to easily tell in which direction the vessel is travelling
- Flashing lights can seriously impair night vision so if travelling in a group they must be above or below eye level

Tip: Many fixed LED lights can be converted to flashing by turning the battery over or by buying a different battery type rather than replacing the whole light.

COACHING LAUNCHES

As power driven vessels capable of exceeding 7 knots vessels used for coaching should, display an all-round white light and, port and starboard navigation lights.

WHY SHOULD I READ THIS GUIDE?

The low profile of rowing vessels, kayaks and canoes on a congested river where lines of sight are often fouled, either by vessel construction or structures such as bridges, piers and buildings makes them difficult to see by night or day and presents a significant hazard. A number of potentially fatal incidents have resulted from large vessels being unable to see small recreational craft until too late.

Even if you are navigating correctly and keeping a good lookout it is still possible to be involved in an incident with another vessel who might not be following the rules. The River Thames is a moving highway used by a great variety of traffic and as with any other busy highway one must be alert to and allow for all conceivable dangers and you must make yourself as visible as possible at all times.

This advice is for river users who intend to paddle or row on the Tidal Thames between Crossness and Teddington during the hours of darkness or in times of reduced visibility. Powered craft and larger sailing vessels have very specific rules set down for them in the ColRegs which must be followed at all times. Technically rowing boats and canoes are only required to have a torch at hand. However this is totally insufficient for such a busy waterway and various directions on lighting have been issued in a number of our publications. This guide intends to clarify those and update them based on the results of a number of trials. Whilst the main goal of all those on the river at night should be to be as visible as possible, it is still important to stay within the bounds of correct regulation. If you are unsure your whether lighting system is acceptable - just ask!

YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATION

Rule 25 of the ColRegs states: *Therefore rowing vessels and canoes, as a minimum, should ‘... have ready at hand an electric torch, lighted lantern or other means to show an all-round (360 degrees) white light, which shall be exhibited in sufficient time to prevent collision.’* This rule, acknowledging the difficulty of seeing a small vessel at night or in reduced visibility, clearly puts the onus on the small vessel to show the specified light in time. However in the densely trafficked areas of the Tidal Thames and with the added hazard of high speed vessels, vessels under oars (or paddles) should display a flashing white light visible over an arc of 360 degrees (an all-round white light). Fixed white lights are also correct, but are not as effective at attracting the attention of other river users. In certain vessels two lights, one forward and one aft, may be required to ensure visibility throughout 360 degrees. When using multiple lights it is recommended that one of the lights be fixed and one flashing, to ensure maximum visibility.

SHOULD I GO OUT?

Each time before going afloat rowers, kayakers and canoeists must assess whether it is safe to do so, especially so at night. Low and high tides and weather conditions such as fog and rain can dramatically increase the already heightened level of risk of rowing in the dark. Navigating on the Tidal Thames at night should never be undertaken lightly and should only be attempted by the experienced. Always make sure that someone knows your travel plans and if possible travel as part of a group. In addition, in-line with the recommendations of the majority of the rowing clubs upstream of Putney Bridge, the PLA does not recommend rowing downstream of Putney Bridge at night.



DIFFUSED LIGHT

All-around lights can be expensive and difficult to get hold of. A normal directional light, such as a torch, can be modified into an all-around light by fitting it with a diffuser:



The above is a waterproof diving torch with a translucent plastic bottle shaped to fit over the light. Such bottles can be found in most bathroom cabinets!



HIGH VISIBILITY

Under all conditions of visibility by night and day the wearing of high visibility vests and the adorning of craft and the shafts of oars/paddles with reflective tape to enhance visibility are very strongly recommended.

Drawing the attention of other river users to your vessel is not just limited to the use of lights and high visibility clothing:

- Consider the use of **flags** or similar in order to raise the profile of the vessel and present a larger visual target.
- **Position** small craft in the river where they may easily be observed by larger vessels. The warning often carried by lorries on the roads of “if you cannot see my mirrors then I cannot see you” has an echo here; small craft should place themselves where they are able to see **the bridge or wheelhouse windows and ideally the helmsman also of other larger vessels.**
- Give vessels on **piers** a wide berth if at all possible.
- **Handheld VHF** can be used both to listen for vessel movements and to alert large vessels to your presence – especially when passing piers.