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STARTING RACES USING RULE 26

(By Tom Farquhar, Former Chairman, US SAILING Race Management Committee)

In the Racing Rules of Sailing 2005-2008 ("RRS"), ISAF has included only one starting system. This five-minute sequence has been in the RRS since 2001.

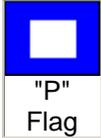
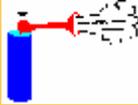
26 STARTING RACES

Races shall be started by using the following signals. Times shall be taken from the visual signals; the absence of a sound signal shall be disregarded.

<u>Signal</u>	<u>Flag and sound</u>	<u>Minutes before starting signal</u>
Warning	Class flag; 1 sound	5*
Preparatory	P, I, Z, Z with I, or black flag; 1 sound	4
One-minute	Preparatory flag removed; 1 long sound	1
Starting	Class flag removed; 1 sound	0

* or as stated in the sailing instructions

The warning signal for each succeeding class shall be made with or after the starting signal of the preceding class.

Title	Visual Signal	Sound Signal	Time to Start
Warning	Class Flag(s) Displayed	1 	5* minutes
Preparatory	 or  or  or  or  or 	1 	4 minutes
	Preparatory Flag(s) Removed	1 	1 minute
Start	Class Flag(s) Removed	1 	0
<p>* or as stated in the sailing instructions</p> <p>The warning signal for each succeeding class shall be made with or after the starting signal of the preceding class.</p>			

The principal advantage of this system is that the quality of the racing can be improved, since the race committee has an opportunity to adjust the starting line before each starting sequence (without a postponement) and to change the time between successive starts.

For large classes and in some other circumstances, more than one minute is appropriate between the warning and the preparatory signals. If you want to change that interval you need to state the change in the sailing instructions. Such a change does not change RRS 26 (see the * in the rule). An even simpler approach is to say in the sailing instructions that the course will be designated X minutes before the warning signal.

There are several advantages of this system:

- ❑ If the starting line needs to be adjusted for a succeeding class, no postponement is necessary. The adjustment may be to change the angle of the starting line, due to a wind shift or because the RC did not get it exactly right the first time. When starting classes of substantially different sizes, the RC can change the length of the starting line between classes in order to make the line length suitable for smaller classes.
- ❑ The race committee can provide for as much or as little separation between classes as it feels will provide the best racing. This includes delaying a start if there are a lot of stragglers in the preceding start, without having to postpone. When starting classes with different speeds on the same course, the intervals between the class starts can be selected individually to minimize the overlaps among fleets on the course. There is no fixed interval between starts.
- ❑ There is flexibility to change the interval between the warning and the preparatory signals, without changing the rule. This means that for large fleets the interval can be increased to allow sufficient time after the warning signal and before the preparatory signal for all the boats to decide where they want to start and to get there.
- ❑ Some flag is up throughout the sequence, including the last minute before the starting signal--competitors should always know what class is in its starting sequence.
- ❑ The use of flags gives the race committee flexibility to display the visual signals where they will have maximum visibility. Using small diameter poles, such as bamboo or PVC, makes it easy to move the flags' location.
- ❑ Flags on poles can be displayed or lowered quickly, which is helpful to competitors who are looking for accurate time signals.
- ❑ By making a sound signal when lowering the preparatory signal at one minute before the start, the race committee has called attention to the impending starting signal, in the same way that the warning signal at five minutes before the start calls attention to the impending preparatory signal.
- ❑ If halyards are used, only two are needed for the starting signals (for one class). More are needed for the recall signals.
- ❑ Class flags provide an almost foolproof way of letting the competitors know who is supposed to be starting. This is especially useful when the planned starting order is interrupted by a general recall or postponement, which frequently causes confusion. In this system, the class flag remains displayed throughout the starting sequence.

- ❑ The race committee uses the same procedure for all starts--those with starting penalties (flag I, Z, Z and I, or black flag) and those without (flag P). This should reduce errors.
- ❑ There is less "wasted" time (5 minutes less) between the warning and the starting signals vs. starting classes at ten-minute intervals. For events with several classes, this can be significant.

In order to use this starting system without modification, nothing needs to be put into the sailing instructions except a list of the class flags. If flag P is not available, a blue flag can be substituted, but the sailing instructions must be changed to substitute "blue flag" for "flag P."

Class flags are required to implement this starting system. However, class flags can be whatever the sailing instructions define them to be. If the race committee has flags with the official class insignias on them, that is ideal. If not, code flags that do not have a special meaning, or even plain colored flags work perfectly well. Many large regattas, e.g. the Sailing World NOOD Regattas, have used plain colored flag as class flags for many years. Using the class insignia on flags of different colors to separate different divisions of a class, such as men and women, works well.

For the first warning signal in a series of starts at a scheduled time, typically the first race of a day, no signal should be made before the first warning. It is a courtesy to the competitors for the race committee to make some sort of signal, such as a series of short sound signals, before beginning the starting sequences for races that are not being started at a scheduled time. To avoid confusion, the race committee should state its intention to do so in the sailing instructions.

RRS 29.2 requires that a **warning** signal be made one minute after the lowering of the First Substitute (general recall). This avoids any possible confusion about when the class flag should be put up after a general recall.

Clubs and other local sailing organizations that want to use some other starting system can do so, as long as they include the system in full in their sailing instructions, and state that it replaces the system in RRS 26.

Having one starting system in use throughout the world has made it less confusing for competitors, and the rule 26 starting system permits the race committee to provide better racing.