

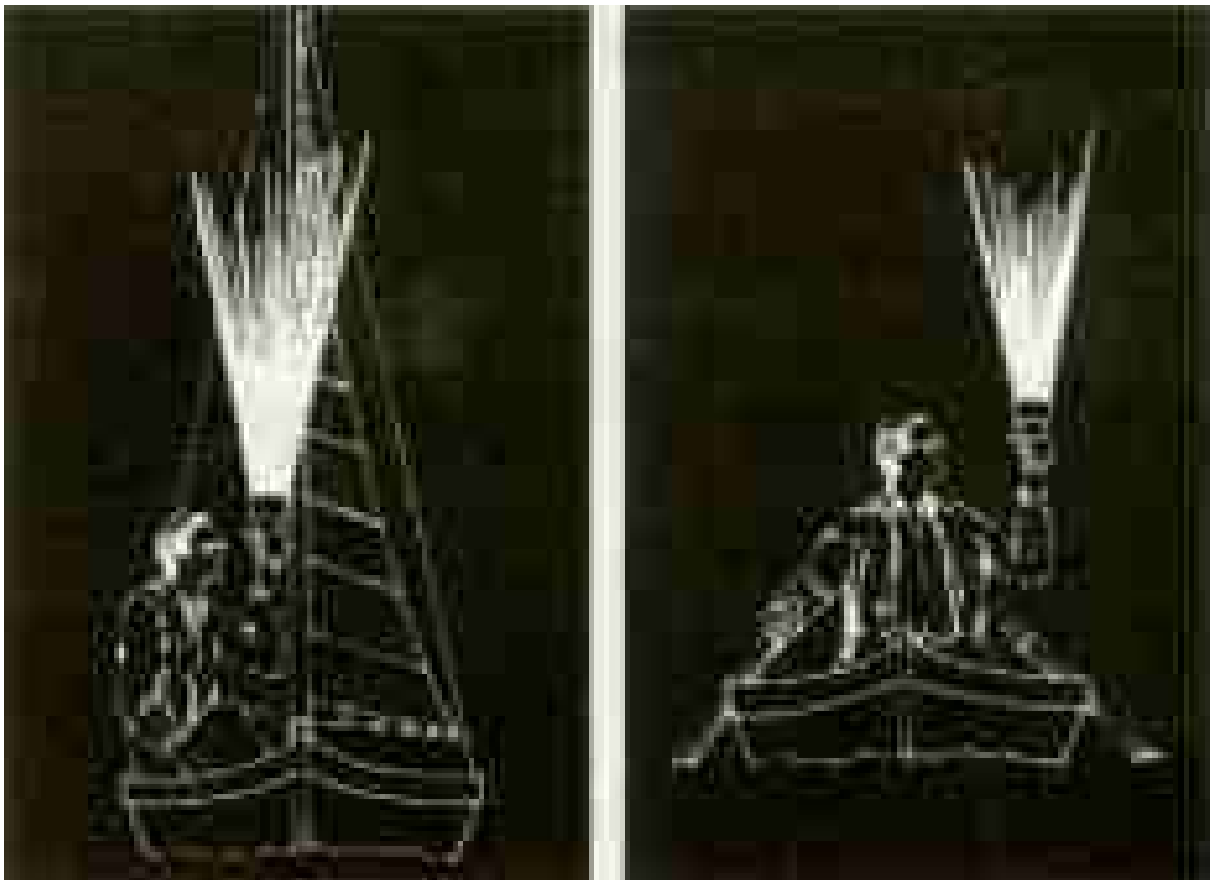
The Requirements For Light And Sound Signals

By Brian Blankinship

In the previous article I discussed the rules of the nautical road as delineated in the Inland Navigation Rules. That Federal code also has requirements for light and sound signals:

Part C - Lights and Shapes

From sunset to sunrise, or in restricted visibility, kayaks must carry a white light that must be accessible and bright enough to be displayed to prevent collision. The picture in the regulation shows illuminating your own craft rather than pointing at the approaching vessel.



Kayaks MAY also display red/green side lights and a white, 360 degree stern light.

Part D - Sound and Light Signals:

Rule 33 Equipment for Sound Signals: Kayaks are required to carry a whistle, horn or other device that can be heard by other vessels in time to avoid a collision. There is no requirement for audible distance for boats less than 12 meters long, but I strongly recommend a Fox 40 or Storm whistle, or horn.



Rule 34 Maneuvering and Warning Signals:

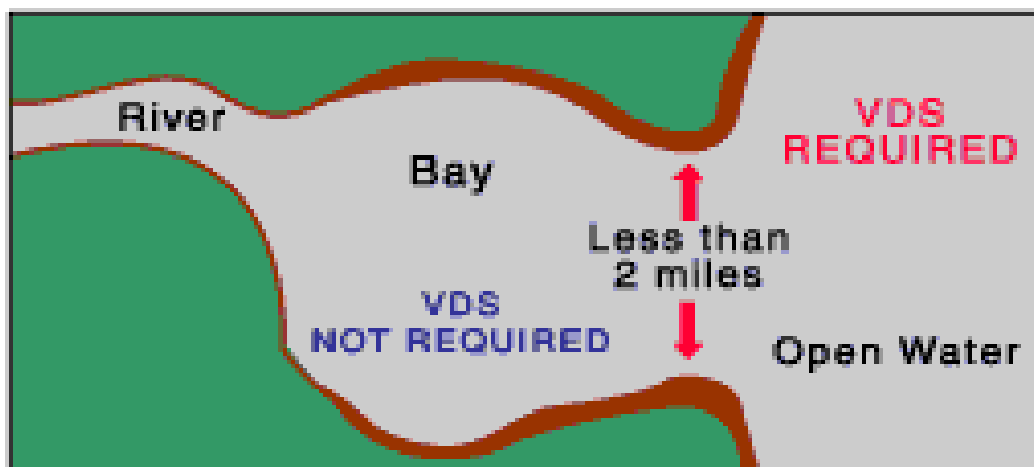
- One short (one second) blast: "You will be on my left."
- Two short blasts: "You will be on my right."
- Three short blasts: "I am going backward."

You can respond by giving the same signal. If you disagree sound the danger signal: Signal with five short blasts if there is confusion or danger. If you hear a long blast from around a corner, sound one long blast back and watch out!

Rule 35 Sound Signals in Restricted Visibility: In reduced visibility, sound one 4-6 second blast on your whistle/horn every two minutes or less.

Rule 36 Signals to Attract Attention: You can use a whistle/horn or light to get someone's attention as long as it doesn't appear to be a navigation signal.

Rule 37 Distress Signals and Annex IV 33 CFR 87 Distress Signals: Kayaks are not required to carry day signals. Visual distress signals for night are required to be carried in this area, sunset to sunrise on bodies of water that lead to the ocean, up to a point where the water is two miles wide. An example would be the entire Chesapeake Bay and the adjoining rivers up to the point they are no longer two miles wide.



Visual Distress Signals for night appropriate for kayaks:

- Rockets, parachute flares or shells which throw red stars; fired one at a time, at short intervals. A set of three flares equals one signal. Flares also expire after three years.
- A white strobe flashing at regular intervals from 50 to 70 times per minute. Unless the strobe automatically flashes SOS, it is considered a distress signal on inland waters only, and doesn't meet the requirements for carrying distress signals.
- Flares are good for signaling distress over a distance. I recommend also carrying a strobe to show your exact location once they are looking for you. Of course, a VHF radio would be even better.

Other Distress signals kayaks might use:

- S-O-S (...-----) in the Morse Code, flashed by a mirror or other means
- The spoken word "Mayday" on a VHF radio
- A smoke signal giving off orange-colored smoke
- Slowly and repeatedly raising and lowering arms or paddle outstretched to each side

Don't use your strobe (or other distress signal) unless you are signaling an emergency.

There is a separate law that requires you to have a USCG approved personal flotation device (PFD) on-board. CPA club rules require the PFD (and a sprayskirt for sit-in boats) be worn.

In summary, in daytime, you are required by law to have a PFD and a whistle. At night you must also have a white light, and in waters up to two miles wide (as mentioned above), must carry flares.