

Rules of the road in Victoria's Harbour System

REQUIRED READING for all FGPC outrigger and dragon boat steerspeople,
kayak rental staff and coaches

Commercial and recreational traffic is increasing in Victoria's harbour system, which consists of the upper, inner, middle and outer harbours (**upper** [5 knots / that's our area north of Johnson Street Bridge], **inner** [5 knots / in front of the Empress etc], **middle** [5 knots / the seaplane runway and new marina] and **outer** [7 knots / from Colville Island to Ogden Point and V21]). The general traffic flow pattern for paddlers in the harbour sections is attached to this email for your reference. Please review it and let me know if you've any questions.

Like all maritime nations, Canada has rules to prevent accidents on the water. In Canada these are called ColRegs ([Collision Regulations](#)), which are part of the *Canada Shipping Act*. These rules form part of the laws that govern us all. Like all rules they are subject to interpretation. For the sake of FGPC – the largest non-motorized user of Victoria's harbour system – here's the club's interpretation of Canada's ColRegs as they apply to us. Note that this is my plain-language translation of the legislation.

- A. Any boat that is overtaking another, regardless of size (for example, an OC2 overtaking a dragon boat or harbour ferry) must YIELD. In other words, the slower vessel has right-of-way over the faster vessel overtaking it. If one OC6 is passing another, the faster OC6 must NOT impede or interfere with the direction and maneuverability of the "slower" OC6.
- B. Big boats have right-of-way over small boats because they're less maneuverable. Vessels that are towing or pushing/pulling other vessels have even MORE right-of-way...over everyone. Outriggers and dragon boats are small; we must always yield. To yield means to stay out of the way. Here's the key point about yielding: staying out of the way on the water means BEING SEEN TO STAY OUT OF THE WAY: **your intent to yield can't be a minor correction but an OBVIOUS corrective move. This is actually part of the law on the water.**
- C. On land, we drive on divided roadways. There are lines down the middle of roads that separate outbound from inbound traffic. On the water, there's only one "lane," and the all boats MUST BE SEEN TO YIELD if they don't have right of way. Please remember this: captains, first mates, officers – anyone in charge of larger vessels – take "bearings." If an oncoming boat (like a dragon boat or outrigger) is seen by a larger vessel at close hand or at a distance to be moving neither right nor left then the outrigger or dragon boat **is deemed to be on a collision course with the larger vessel.** Unlike roads with dividing lines, people on larger vessels are required to assume that a vessel bearing neither right nor left is going to collide with them. Remember this, because it's important.
- D. Someone steering an outrigger or a dragon boat may assume that he or she has lots of room to manoeuvre around a larger vessel. OUR PERSPECTIVE DOESN'T MATTER because we are the ones required to yield.
- E. From the perspective of the captain or pilot of the larger vessel, the smaller boat MUST BE SEEN TO OBVIOUSLY DIVERT (PREFERABLY TO THE RIGHT OR STARBOARD) in order to avoid a collision course. Stopping on a course isn't good enough from the perspective of the larger vessel, because you haven't diverted.

- F. In the case of the Johnson Street Bridge, stopping on either side of the bridge doesn't fulfil the requirement to yield. For FGPC paddlers, steersmen **MUST BE SEEN TO YIELD**. This means, for example, that if the bridge is up and a vessel larger than yourself is heading toward the bridge, you must obviously divert to the left or right of the bridge and hold in place until the waterway is clear (by at least 50 meters at bow and stern).
- G. In the case of the outer harbour, FGPC paddlers must yield the centre channel and **MUST BE SEEN TO DIVERT TO THE CLOSEST SHORE** in order to avoid perceptions of collision from the point of view of the larger vessel. For your interest, the Coho crew has a blind spot that extends 250 feet from the bow of their vessel.
- H. In the case of open water, FGPC paddlers can assume, from their perspective, that a larger vessel is kilometers away and there's no chance of collision. For example, paddlers may be training beyond the mouth of the harbour and see the Coho ferry inbound to Victoria. To comply with Canada's collision regulations, our smaller vessels **MUST BE SEEN** to veer to the left or right of the inbound vessel (veering right or starboard is the required choice in close quarters) even if it's a great distance away. Again, please remember: it's not our point of view that counts – it's always the perspective of the larger vessel that counts. A small correction to the left or right isn't enough. By law, you must correct enough to make your intent obvious to the oncoming vessel.
- I. In the case of tug boats, sea planes and other vessels maneuvering in our harbour system, FGPC dragon boats, outriggers, kayaks, SUPs and coach boat operators **MUST STEER 50 METERS CLEAR**. When approaching a working vessel within the harbour system, you must be seen to steer clear **AND** remain at least 50 meters away. In the case of the Johnson Street Bridge, this means **DON'T GO UNDER THE BRIDGE** if you expect to encounter a tug boat or other commercial vessel.
- J. I would encourage everyone to read Canada's ColRegs ([Collision Regulations](#)). It's not light reading, but it's worthwhile for serious paddlers and steerspeople. Further, if an FGPC program or group of paddlers wants an in-depth presentation on Victoria's harbour system and the rules of the road, send an email to Erik (gm@fgpaddle.com) and FGPC will arrange a presentation from the Harbour Master for your program or group.
- K. It's important to note that under maritime law, everyone is responsible for avoiding collisions and incidents. "Blame" is portioned. This means that everyone involved in an incident is held responsible (legally and financially) for some, most or part of an incident.
- L. Finally, heads up! Victoria's Harbour Master and Harbour Patrol now have sweeping, high-definition video coverage of the harbour network from beyond the mouth of the harbour to the water directly in front of FGPC. The Harbour Master's office is now a bank of large high-def screens that provide 360-degree views of every section of the waterway, and live and stored footage can be isolated and zoomed into to provide facial details of every paddler, every harbour ferry operator, and every FGPC steersman and coach boat operator, dating back 30 days. It's quite something to behold.

Thanks for your attention and interest. Let's keep our sport fun...and safe. Paddles up!

Erik

Public Port of Victoria Traffic Scheme

This chart is **NOT** a navigation aid. For official information on aids to navigation and water depths, refer to Chart 3412 publ the Canadian Hydrographic Service.

Victoria Harbour is a water airport
BOATERS MUST KEEP CLEAR OF SEAPLANE RUNWAYS

No drone zone
PERMIT REQUIRED

- PRIORITY LANE
- GIVE-WAY LANE
- NO STOPPING
- PADDLERS ONLY
- LOW TIDE HAZARD
- NO ACCESS
- CURRENT HAZARD
- EMERGENCY REFUGE LOCATIONS
- MARKER/BUOY
- BRIDGE
- TRESTLE BRIDGE

ALL GORGE WATERWAY USERS MUST FOLLOW TRANSPORT CANADA SAFETY REGULATIONS

This traffic scheme has been adapted by the Fairway Gorge Paddling Club for the use of its paddling and programs. All FGPC paddlers must comply with this version of the traffic scheme. For more information, contact FGPC at 778.432.3472 or email info@fgpaddle.com

ESQUIMALT



LEGEND

	5 knot speed limit		Strobe light When activated, immersion take off or landing of a seaplane
	7 knot speed limit		Seaplane runways
	No powered vessels 5 knot speed limit		Seaplane taxiway
	No boats		Powered vessels of 20m (65 ft) in length or greater permitted Transit these areas without stopping
	Fuel dock		Seaplane arrival and departure route
	Black water pump out station		Runway crossing Vessels may cross in this location only when strobe lights are not activated
	Centre line buoy Keep yellow buoys close to port at all times		Information buoy Non-powered driven vessel: remain north of the five white information buoys