

## **COLREGS – THE 4 STAGES OF A ‘CLOSE ENCOUNTER’**

1. No risk of collision -- do whatever you like
2. Risk of collision identified -- standing on is compulsory
3. Give way vessel identified as not taking action -- stand on vessel has option of taking action
4. Give way vessel cannot avoid collision -- stand on vessel must take action.

The problem is identifying when you cross the line between the different phases.

The first one is relatively easy. We have legal precedent that says six miles is in phase 1. But at some distance less than 6 miles, we move into phase 2. If you want to be sure of staying within the law, I would suggest that it makes sense to regard it as starting at 6 miles, because we have no precedent to suggest that phase 1 lasts any longer than that.

So when does phase 2 end? It's very difficult to be certain when someone driving a completely different vessel might be expected to have taken action, particularly for someone with no similar experience. Many recreational yotters (sail and power) are inclined to exaggerate the lack of manoeuvrability of a ship: we all hear stories that it takes X miles for a supertanker to stop, but forget that in a collision situation, we are not usually expecting the Globtic Tokyo to drift to a halt: we are probably talking about a few thousand tons of general cargo vessel altering course by five or ten degrees -- something that takes only a few tens of seconds, and that can be completed in just a couple of ship-lengths.

( <http://shipsbusiness.com/turning-circle.html>, for instance, shows that a 20,000ton container ship, nearly 300m long, can turn a complete 360-degree circle in less than half a mile, even at 26knots )

There is quite a lot of research that suggests that in ship-ship encounters, most watchkeepers regard this optional give way phase as beginning at about 2 miles or so. But in ship/small craft encounters it could be very much less: we cannot be certain that we are into phase 3 until we are **well within** two miles.

A couple of minutes after we cross the two mile range ring on the ship's radar, her watchkeeper starts to run out of options. But we (in small craft) don't. When a ship is a few hundred yards away, he can't do anything about it --- but we can. We are then in the fourth phase, where avoiding action is compulsory . . . as well as common sense.

The problem is that many people seem to think that at four miles they are still in phase 1, but that at 2 miles they are already into phase three or four. The ship, OTOH, may well have altered course by five degrees to go astern of you when he was still six miles away. By altering course "to go astern of him" at three miles, you might be negating the effect of his action.

*(from a forum post on YBW by Tim Bartlett)*