

safe  
boating hints  
for the

# southern coast



STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
THE RESOURCES AGENCY  
DEPARTMENT OF BOATING AND WATERWAYS

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## Southern Coast

Even though the coast's sunny weather, sandy beaches, and offshore islands provide an ideal water recreation area, boaters who are not familiar with Southern California should be aware that there are hazards to be encountered when boating along the coast.

## Weather

The popularity of boating in Southern California is primarily due to the usually reliable weather that permits boating year round. Even so, good weather cannot always be taken for granted. To avoid weather-related problems, prudent skippers should acquire some knowledge of particular weather patterns—storm fronts, high winds, and fog—that affect boating, and should become familiar with available sources of forecasts and warning information.

One weather pattern associated with clear skies is the dry northeast wind called the "Santana," but commonly referred to as the "Santa Ana." When a Santa Ana wind occurs, small craft advisories or even gale warnings may be issued.

The season for the Santa Ana winds is from November through January, although conditions similar to the Santa Ana may occur at other times of the year. The strongest offshore winds usually occur during the first day or two of a Santa Ana, but weaker Santa Ana winds may persist for another four to six days.

As the winds weaken, final breakdown of the Santa Ana causes favorable conditions for coastal fog. If desert temperatures are forecast to be noticeably higher than coastal temperatures, the formation of fog is very likely. Another predictor of fog is a significant rise in humidity and a decrease in visibility, caused by smoke and smog.

Near-zero visibility created by dense fog poses a very serious hazard to the recreational boater. A skipper's choices may be limited between returning to port if visibility permits, or remaining at sea until it improves.

Navigating in fog is dangerous. Aside from the risk of collision, a vessel without proper navigational equipment can easily lose direction and become vulnerable to other dangers. A compass, an up-to-date chart, and training in coastal piloting are basic needs. Depth sounders, radio direction-finders, or other electronic position-finding equipment are highly recommended.

Weather information is available on most commercial radio stations. Weather broadcasts can be heard twenty-four hours a day from Los Angeles on 162.55 MHz (VHF marine WX-1) and from San Diego on 162.4 MHz (VHF marine WX-2.) The Coast Guard broadcasts offshore forecasts and storm warnings on 2670 kHz after an initial announcement on 2182 kHz.

Taped weather information is available at the following telephone numbers:

**Los Angeles**  
**(805) 988-6610**




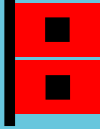




**San Diego**  
**(619) 289-1212**

**Newport Beach**  
**(858) 675-8700**

The wise boater will always check the weather before getting under way. In addition, frequent weather checks at sea will keep the boater aware of revised forecasts. For additional information on hazards, shoaling, local changes to navigational aids, and bridge closings, consult the "Local Notice to Mariners," available from the U.S. Coast Guard, (510) 437-2976 or visit [www.navcen.uscg.gov/lnm](http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/lnm).

## Weather Advisories

Weather advisories are displayed at some marinas and harbormasters' offices.

Storm Advisories					
<b>Daytime Signals</b>					<p>■ Black</p> <p>■ Red</p>
<b>Night Signals</b>					<p>NOTE: In some areas, the display of storm advisory flags has been discontinued. Check current weather conditions before getting under way.</p>
	<b>Small Craft</b> Winds up to 38 mph	<b>Gale</b> Winds 39 to 54 mph	<b>Storm</b> Winds 55 to 73 mph	<b>Hurricane</b> Winds 74 mph and up	

## Sea and Swell

Sea and swell conditions on Southern California coastal waters often affect boating comfort and safety. Sea waves are choppy—steep, chaotic, and sharp crested. Swell waves are smoother crested and of longer intervals. Rapidly increasing winds can create hazardous sea conditions. A 35-mph wind can generate three- to five-foot waves within an hour or two over an initially calm surface. If the ocean surface is already disturbed by large swell conditions, a 35-mph wind can generate high waves which, when superimposed upon swell, result in very large waves at random intervals. These large waves can suddenly cause a boat to lose its maneuverability or capsize.

Tropical storms thousands of miles away can generate large swells that affect coastal boating. Some tropical storms can result in six- to eight-foot breakers along portions of the coastline facing south.

## Stay Out of the Surf

As ocean swells reach shallow water close to shore, they break and cause surf. Breakers are difficult to see from seaward, and the unwary boat operator may be caught in surf before realizing it. A suitable anchor with a strong line of sufficient length is a necessity. Timely use of anchoring gear has saved many boats from being destroyed by surf and prevented many fatalities.

## Harbor Entrances

Manmade harbors are created through construction of jettied entrances and offshore breakwaters which may be hazardous to navigate through at night or in fog. Entrance channels are generally lighted or marked by buoys. Returning boaters should consult charts carefully to identify entrance channel lights and not confuse them with city lights.

Ocean currents may cause sand to drift into some harbor entrances, creating shoals and resulting in surf conditions, especially at low tide.

## When You Need Assistance

If your vessel loses power or suffers a casualty, there are several ways to obtain assistance. The Coast Guard is the primary search and rescue agency along the coast. A VHF marine radio equipped to handle Coast Guard frequencies will help to ensure that assistance is on its way. However, the quickest remedy may be to seek the aid of a passing boat.

If you are drifting toward the surf line, set anchor immediately. Have everyone on board not already wearing life jackets put them on immediately. Then seek assistance. Spare engine parts (spark plugs, generator belts, etc.) have saved many boats and lives. Extra fuel will provide extra confidence when a headwind picks up.

## Congested Traffic

Harbors are often crowded. Maneuver carefully and look for other traffic leaving or returning to dock.

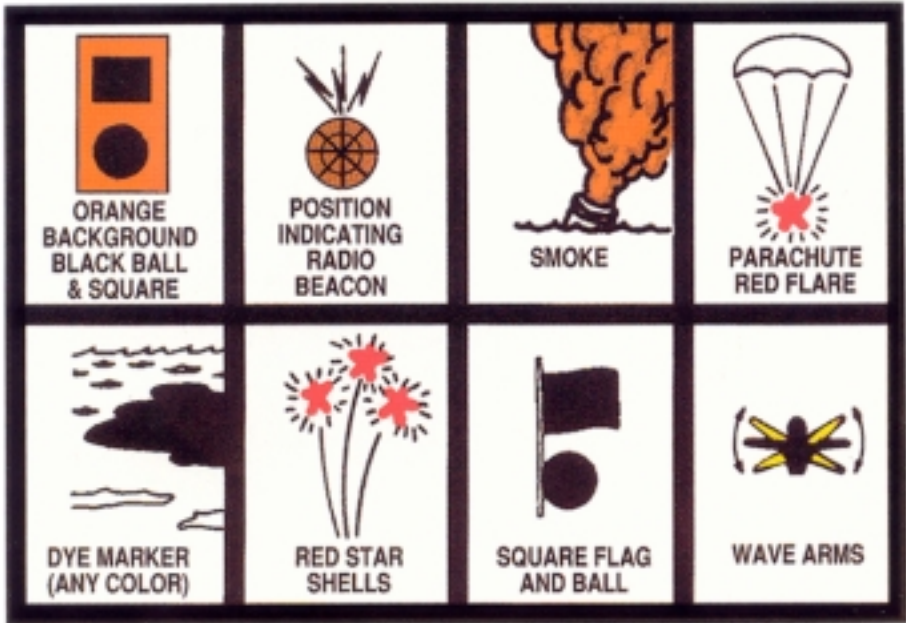
Large, deep-draft vessels are commonly limited to operating within harbor channels because of insufficient water depths outside the channels. These vessels CANNOT EASILY MANEUVER OR STOP to avoid small craft. Rules of the road, as well as common sense, require all small boats, whether sail or power, to keep clear.

All vessels, both power and sail, should keep to the right side of channels whenever possible, unless local traffic separation systems dictate otherwise. One such system, marked by orange and white buoys, exists in the main channel at Marina del Rey. The system consists of a 500-foot-wide center corridor flanked by two 200-foot-wide outer corridors. The middle corridor is recommended for the use of vessels under sail power only. Other vessels should use the outer corridor to their right.

## Distress Signals

Visual Distress Signals: The Coast Guard requires that vessels operating on coastal waters and on the high seas carry the required number of approved visual distress-signaling devices. Recreational boats 16 feet or longer must carry suitable devices aboard at all times. Boats less than 16 feet; manually propelled craft of any size; and sailboats of completely open construction, not equipped with propulsion machinery and under 26 feet in length are only required to carry suitable signaling devices between sunset and sunrise. All the devices must be Coast Guard approved, readily accessible, and in serviceable condition. For more information on the types of approved devices, consult the "ABCs of the California Boating Law," available free of charge from the Department of Boating and Waterways.

**Recognized Distress Signals:** The following are some of the more common signals that are recognized as indicating distress and need for assistance.



## Float Plan

A search for an overdue boat will have a much greater chance of success if, before departure, the operator's cruising plans have been relayed to a reliable person who will notify authorities if necessary. The plan should include the vessel's name or CF number, the length, type and color of boat, power, and its cruising range and speed; the number of passengers and their names and phone numbers; your destination, times of departure and expected return; and telephone numbers of rescue agencies. This is called "filing a float plan."

**Don't Forget To Cancel Your Float Plan!**

**BOATING SAFETY CLASSES** explaining required and recommended equipment for small boats and offering training in good seamanship are conducted throughout California by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Power Squadrons and certain chapters of the American Red Cross. For information on Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron classes, call (800) SEA-SKIL (732-7545) or (800) 368-5647. The Department of Boating and Waterways offers a free home study course entitled *California Boating Safety Course*. For more information, e-mail us at [pubinfo@dbw.ca.gov](mailto:pubinfo@dbw.ca.gov), or phone (916) 263-1331 or tollfree (888) 326-2822, or write: Department of Boating and Waterways, 2000 Evergreen Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, California 95815-3888. Visit our Website at [www.dbw.ca.gov](http://www.dbw.ca.gov).