

Cape Cod Canal Boating Safety Guide



The sheltered waters of the Cape Cod Canal offer some of the most scenic and enjoyable recreational boating opportunities on Cape Cod. Yet swift currents, and a high volume of large commercial traffic, can make transiting the Canal a challenge for boat operators of any level of experience. Within this recreational boating guide are a few rules of the road, and safety tips that, when followed, will help ensure your canal transit will be a safe and pleasurable one.

Rules of the Road

Federal regulations governing the use of the Cape Cod Canal include the following rules for recreational boating:

Vessels Allowed Passage

- Vessels 65 feet or more in length are required to contact the Marine Traffic Controller on channel 14 VHF before entering the Canal. All radio equipped vessels should monitor channel 13 VHF while transiting the canal.
- Vessels must be adequately powered, properly equipped, and seaworthy in order to transit the Canal.
- Sailing vessels are required to have and use auxiliary power during passage throughout the Canal.
- Personal Watercraft, to include all types of JetSki, Kayaks, Canoes, Wind Surfers, or other non-motorized craft are not permitted to operate within, or pass through the federally maintained limits of the Canal.



Rules for Navigation

- *Speed* - A 10 m.p.h. "no excessive wake" speed limit is in effect for both the land-cut and approach channels of the Cape Cod Canal. This speed limit is strictly enforced to prevent bank and dike erosion, to ensure the safety of vessels using the Canal, and to protect visitors along the banks of the Canal.
- *Obstructing Navigation* - Stopping, anchoring, unnecessarily idling at a low speed or otherwise obstructing navigation within the limits of the Canal is prohibited. Low powered vessels not making adequate headway are an obstruction to navigation. Vessels must stay to right hand side of the channel while transiting.
- *Railroad Bridge* - Vessels shall not travel under the Railroad Bridge while it is in the process of being lowered, or while it is fixed in the lowered position. All Vessels must maintain an adequate safe distance from the bridge while it is fixed in the lowered position.
- *Fishing* - Fishing, Trolling, or Lobstering by boat within the land cut, or the confines of the approach channels of the Canal, as defined by US Coast Guard buoys and beacons, is obstructing navigation and is strictly prohibited.

- **Swimming/Diving** - Swimming, Snorkeling or Scuba diving within the limits of the Cape Cod Canal is prohibited.
- **Emergencies** - Boat operators are required to notify the Marine Traffic Controller immediately, via channel 13 VHF, if an emergency situation has developed, or appears to be developing. When the Marine Traffic Controller, or patrol boat operator determines that an emergency situation exists, they are authorized to require boat operators to accept assistance from government vessels.
- **Right of Way Hierarchy** - While transiting the Canal, the following right of way hierarchy shall be observed, in addition to the US Coast Guard Navigation Rules:
 1. Vessels under 65 feet in length shall not interfere with vessels 65 feet and over in length.
 2. Recreational vessels shall not interfere with Commercial vessels.
 3. Vessels traveling against the current shall not interfere with vessels traveling with the current.

****For complete Canal Regulations See:
Title 33 Code of Federal Regulations part
207.20**

**Fines range between \$25 & \$5,000 for
violating these regulations.**

Safety Tips

**The two greatest dangers recreational
boaters face in the Canal are the swift
currents and high volume recreational and
large commercial traffic. Here are some
safety tips that can minimize the danger
posed by these two hazards:**

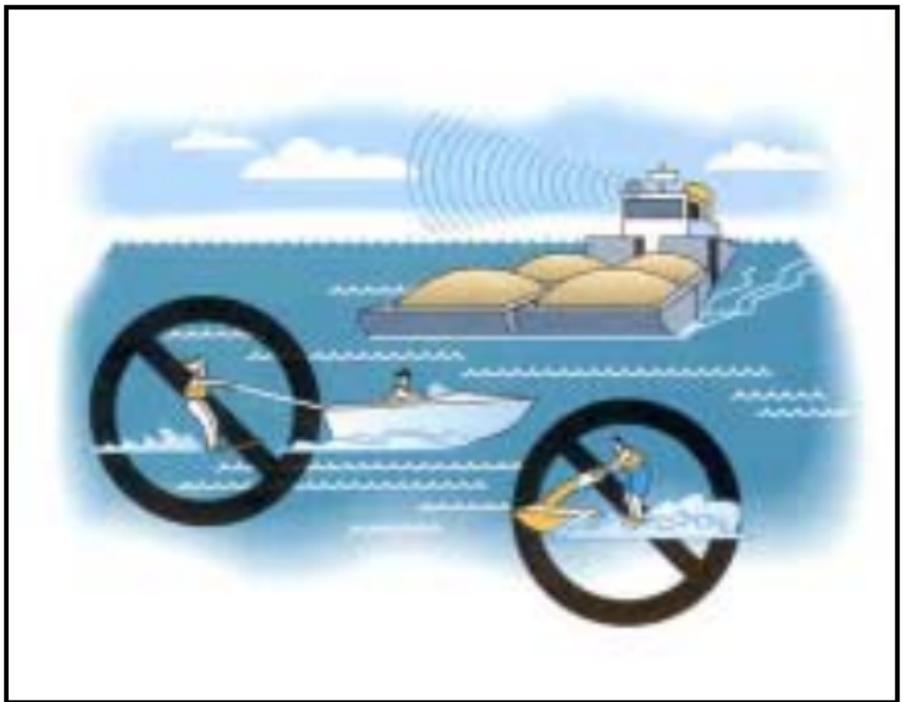
Swift Currents

- The current within the Canal can reach a velocity of 6 knots. Vessels of low power should not attempt to transit the Canal against the current. Transiting against the current in a low powered vessel can cause engine failure (through overheating or excessive fuel consumption) or unnecessary delay in the Canal. Check tide charts and plan accordingly before attempting a transit.**

- Tide charts are available at the Canal Field Office in Buzzards Bay. Copies may be obtained by writing or visiting the Cape Cod Canal Field office on Academy Drive in Buzzards Bay.**

- Remember do not interfere with vessels traveling with the current.**

Large Marine Traffic



- ☑ Stay clear of large marine traffic such as tankers, cruise ships, and tug-and-barge combinations. Once a large commercial vessel enters the Canal it is unable to stop due to the narrow channel limits and swift currents. Also, due to their size, large commercial vessels are unable to maneuver to avoid a collision. Stay clear!

- ☑ Large commercial ships can "steal the wind" from sailing vessels. Sail boaters should use caution while operating near the channel limits of the Canal, and have their auxiliary engines running, even if only in neutral.

- ☑ Learn the whistle signals. Five or more short blasts means danger, stay clear!



- ☑ Large commercial ships have a blind spot directly in front of their bow that can extend for hundreds of feet. This danger zone should be avoided at all times.



- ☑ Tug boats and large commercial vessels can create powerful suction, which can cause small vessels to be pulled toward the tow when passing alongside.



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**
New England District



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