

Northern Coast

The Northern California coast, stretching from Point Reyes to the Oregon border, is a scenic expanse of rocky headlands and beaches almost completely exposed to the open sea. There are few harbors that offer good shelter, and entrance to those harbors may be hazardous at times. Weather is the most crucial factor that the boater needs to consider when traveling in this area. Storms create tremendous waves and surf, dangerous to even the largest ships. The rocky coast demands a thorough knowledge of charts, tide tables and U.S. Coast Pilot No. 7. For example, the knowledgeable boater will always pass seaward of Blunts Reef Buoy off Cape Mendocino.

Weather

This stretch of coastline offers a variety of weather hazards--storms, dense fog, heavy surf, and very often, rough seas. The prevailing winds in summer are from the northwest.

Summer months generally provide the best boating conditions; however, fog is most common during this season. Navigating in fog is dangerous. Aside from the risk of collision, a vessel without proper navigational equipment is vulnerable to becoming lost and to other dangers. A compass, an up-to-date chart, and training in coastal piloting are basic needs. Depth sounders, LORAN or GPS are highly recommended. If fog is forecast, think twice about going out.

Unlike other areas of California, winter weather varies considerably from summer weather. Winds shift and blow on shore from the west or southwest. Storms usually follow southwesterly winds. Seas and surf can build rapidly from approaching storms. Often, heavy seas result from large storms some distance out to sea.

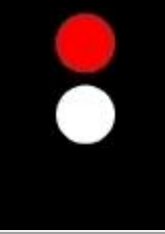
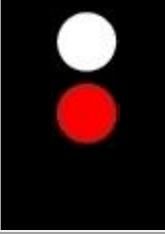
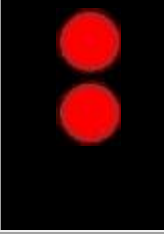
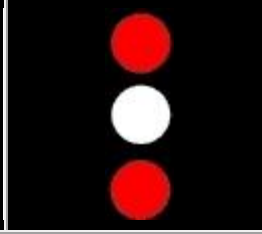
The wise boater will always check the weather before getting under way. In addition, frequent weather checks at sea will keep the boater aware of revised forecasts. Weather information is available on most commercial radio stations. Check local newspapers for the weather broadcast schedules of local radio stations. The National Weather Service broadcasts from San Francisco on 162.55 MHz and from Eureka on 162.40 MHz. Taped weather information is available at the following telephone numbers:

San Francisco	Eureka
(415) 936-1212	(707) 443-7062

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, (310) 980-4300, ext. 501.

Weather advisories are displayed at some marinas and harbor masters' offices.



Night Signals				
	Small Craft = Winds up to 38 mph	Gale = Winds 39 to 54 mph	Storm = Winds 55 to 73 mph	Hurricane = Winds 74 mph and up

Note: In some areas, the display of storm advisory flags has been discontinued. Boaters should check current weather conditions before getting under way.

Ports of Refuge

The harbors that offer good shelter in most weather and sea conditions are Bodega Bay and Crescent City. The Albion River entrance may be difficult even in good weather, and extremely dangerous during storm conditions. Noyo River above the first bend affords excellent protection for small boats. The Noyo Harbor entrance may have breaking waves during a storm. Humboldt Bay can be used as a harbor of refuge in impending bad weather, provided a vessel can get inside before the bar becomes impassable. Shelter from winds from the northwest can be found in Drakes Bay, Fort Ross, Shelter Cove and Trinidad.

Harbor, Bay and River Entrances

When entering or leaving a harbor, special attention is required while passing through the "bar" area. River or tidal currents rushing to sea may clash with wind-driven waves, causing the sea to build and break. It is best to cross this area with a slack (still) or flood current. If you are caught outside and the current is ebbing, it might be best to remain at sea until the tide changes. Tide tables are an important safety item.

When You Need Assistance

If your vessel loses power or suffers damage, there are several ways to get assistance. A marine radio will enable the boater in distress to call for assistance. The Coast Guard, the primary search and rescue agency along the coast, monitors Channel 16 (156.8 MHz) VHF-FM or 2182 kHz AM.

The quickest remedy may be to seek the aid of a passing boat, using a visual distress-signaling device. In addition to equipment requirements for vessels navigating on inland waters, the Coast Guard requires that vessels operating on coastal waters and on the high seas must carry the required number of approved visual distress-signaling devices . The carriage requirements are:

- o All boats 16 feet or more in length must carry devices aboard at all times, EITHER a) both devices suitable for day use and devices suitable for night use OR b) devices that can be used during both day and night.
- o Recreational boats 16 feet or greater in length 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 signaling devices suitable for night use between sunset and sunrise.

All the devices must be Coast Guard-approved, be readily accessible and in serviceable condition.

If you are drifting into surf, set anchor immediately. Break out personal flotation devices and put them on, 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 head wind picks up.

Safety Equipment

In addition to the safety equipment required by law (personal flotation devices, fire extinguishers, lights, etc.) and the safety equipment recommended elsewhere in this pamphlet, it is essential to carry additional equipment to protect you and your passengers from the hazards of this area:

- o An extra anchor or anchors and suitable length rope will hold a powerless vessel off the rocks. Never try to beach a boat in high surf or rocky areas.

- o Extra food and water should be kept aboard when long trips are planned.

- o Keep a good VHF-FM marine radio on board, to monitor weather forecasts and in case of emergency.

- o If you operate your vessel offshore beyond reliable VHF radio range, an EPIRB (emergency position indicating radiobeacon) is highly recommended.

- o Survival suits and a raft are recommended in winter and during