



**Virgin Islands Shipping Registry**

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# **SAFETY ALERT**

## **NOTICE TO MARINERS**

No.2/2015

Applicability: All vessels in Virgin Islands waters

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### **Operation of Small Crafts and Dinghies in Virgin Islands Waters**

Dinghies and small crafts are quite commonly used in the waters of the Virgin Islands, as tenders between ship and shore, making short runs between nearby places, water sports and for fishing. Following a review of a number of accidents, near misses and hazardous situations between small crafts and larger vessels in territorial waters, the Virgin Islands Shipping Registry wishes to alert small craft and dinghy operators of the importance of properly equipping and maintaining boats, good seamanship and knowledge of applicable rules.

While the small craft and dinghies look easy to handle, persons can become complacent and this may lead to hazardous situations. Furthermore, dinghies are small, low in water, and are difficult to spot by larger vessels.

Whilst the knowledge and experience of the Mariners in the Virgin Islands was indeed very high however there were a very small minority of Mariners who for some reason ignored the normal precautions observed by most prudent sailors. An analysis of recent incidents involving small crafts and dinghies indicated that improper compliance and/or inadequate knowledge of collision regulations to be a key factor in contributing to accidents. Failure to keep a lookout, not proceeding at a safe speed and taking incorrect action to avoid collision were common causes of accidents. Some night time near misses were caused due to the boats not having an all-round white light as required by the rules. They were reported to be using flash light and

light from their mobile phones to indicate their presence, which is clearly inadequate and dangerous.

Proper preparation and planning was essential for a safe trip. Any Mariner who ventures alone to sea without informing anyone, risks falling overboard, with no one the wiser. Anyone setting out to sea without checking the weather, risks getting swamped by high seas. Equipping the boats appropriately with VHF Radio, signal flares, life vests, first aid kit, sound signals etc. enhances personal safety. Maintaining the engine, the electrics, bilge pumps and other boat equipment is essential preparation for a safe trip. Again it is important for a Mariner to prepare beforehand on what to do if the engine fails, boat catches fire, starts to flood; someone falls overboard or is seriously injured as well as know who and how to call for help.

Fatigue induced by staying awake for long periods and consumption of alcohol or drugs could seriously impair the judgment of the skipper. This could significantly impair navigational decisions leading to accidents and incidents. VISR strongly recommended every person on board an open boat to wear life vests; and the drivers to be always clipped to the engine kill cord to stop the engine if the driver falls overboard.

Proceeding at high speed creates a large wake that could travel far. The large wake could endanger persons in water such as swimmers, snorkelers, kite surfers, paddle boarders etc. It is important to limit the speed and not create wakes in busy areas. The BVI Ports Authority have established a speed limit of 5 knots within Road Harbour limit. It is important to recognise that the Road Harbour limit is all waters to the north of a line drawn from Hogs Valley Point to Burt Point.

For the VISR, enforcement is not the preferred option to ensure compliance. The Mariners should understand and voluntarily comply for their own personal safety. However there were provisions for heavy penalties upon conviction for any contravention of the Virgin Islands Merchant Shipping Laws including Collision Regulations. Some laws provide penalties for any

conduct that endangers any person or vessel, for operating a power boat whilst impaired by alcohol and for proceeding at more than 5 knots within one hundred yards of low water mark. The Owners are required to staff their vessels with qualified and medically fit persons. The Owner of the vessel is also liable for unsafe operation of their vessel even if they are not on board the vessel.

The Virgin Islands Shipping Registry wishes all Mariners and visitors enjoying the pristine waters of the sailing capital fair winds and following seas.

Captain Raman Bala.

Ag. Director of Shipping

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# Annex

An example of an acceptable arrangement for Navigational Light for small craft and dinghy



Virgin Islands Shipping Registry had been approached to advise on what would be an acceptable arrangement for the light specified for a dinghy or small craft under 7 meters in length, proceeding at under 7 knots speed as per the Collision Regulations.

At Penn's Landing Marina, the VISR examined a Marine Warning Light configured to be fixed on a mast which can be clamped or fixed on the dinghy or small craft. This was found to be an acceptable arrangement for Navigational Light for small craft and dinghy. There may be other equally effective systems available with local chandleries on the Virgin Islands.

Mariners are advised to evaluate the options of available systems and fix a navigational light on their boats. This would enhance their personal and navigational safety.