

Rockville Sail and Power Squadron Rafting Protocol

A raft consists from 2 up to about 10 boats, depending on size and weight of the boats, weather, conditions and preference of the Raft Captain and/or the Cruise Director. Typically, one of the larger boats, with larger anchor and ground tackle, will take on the role of anchor boat. The skipper of the boat that sets the anchor is called the **Raft Captain** unless another person is assigned the job. Being the anchor boat is a voluntary job – no boat regardless of size is required to be the anchor boat. At the Raft Captain's request or with the Raft Captain's permission, one or more additional boats may set an anchor. The skippers of these boats should coordinate their roles as anchor boats with the Raft Captain.

The Raft Captain's goal, when possible, is to place the larger and heavier boats in the center of the raft with the boats getting progressively lighter toward the raft sides. Matching size and weight on starboard and port sides is an important consideration for anchor holding ability, security of the raft and safety of the rafted boats. It is the role of the Raft Captain to determine the order and side of the raft in which boats are added the number of boats in the raft and each boat's location in the raft.

The decision to declare a raft as full, with possible startup of an additional one, should normally be a joint decision by the Raft Captain and Cruise Director. The Raft Captain may decide to break up a raft for anchor holding or other safety reasons. Any boat is at liberty to decide to join or leave the raft based on its own considerations for safety and comfort.

Radio Communications: Every skipper is responsible for monitoring Channel 16 for distress calls or other critical Coast Guard communications and Channel 13 for large ship movements during their travels.

Since few of boats sail from the same location, it is both beneficial and enjoyable to "link in" to the rest of the flotilla at your earliest convenience. Boats on a cruise should hail each other via VHF Channel 16. The channel to which hailing boats then switch should be the Working Channel for the day or for the entire cruise. The normal Working Channel for RSPS is **Channel 71**. The Cruise Director may designate another channel as the Working Channel if it is felt that Channel 71 is being used as the primary channel for races or is overloaded by other communications.

Skippers are encouraged to request and relay information on routes, entrance channel concerns, aids to navigation and other relevant information that may facilitate the safe and timely arrival of all cruisers. Early-arriving boats should relay any pertinent information to boats that are still inbound. Boats should hail and communicate with each other on the lowest power that allows clear communications. When within five miles of each other, a one (1) watt power setting is recommended to help keep busy channels from becoming congested. **Channel 67**, with a restricted frequency of one (1) watt, is the channel for rafting communications.

Rafting Gear: Every boat in the raft should have the following gear:

- Two adequate-sized fenders (Typical fender-sizing guidelines for fenders having a continuous hole through the center are: 25'-40' boats – 8" x 20" 40'-60' boats – 10" x 26")
- Four lines, preferably nylon or other designated docking line:
- 2 bow and stern breast lines and 2 fore and aft spring lines.
- The diameter of all lines should be equal to the boat's regular docking or anchor lines.
- The spring lines should be at least 80% of the length of the boat.
- Lines used for rafting should be free of "eyes" or loops on either end. If this is not an option, the eyes or loops should not be used when tying up to another boat. If used that way it could prevent the boats from releasing the lines if a quick break-up of the raft is needed (lines under tension may not be able to be eased enough to slip the eye off the cleat).

- All boats should carry an adequate anchor and ground tackle. The anchor boat should have ground tackle capable of holding a raft of several boats in normal situations. An oversized anchor and long chain, with enough rode to set at least a 10:1 scope (7:1 if all chain), makes rafting feel much more comfortable during the night.
- As a measure of comfort for both crew and boat, two additional fenders are recommended. Place them where most needed on either side of the boat.
- Normally the boat with the tallest mast will set the anchor light. However, ANY boat in the raft must be ready to set an anchor light and able to operate its motor immediately for maneuvering or breaking up the raft. Having a waterproof spotlight on board is highly recommended.

Joining a Raft: After the anchor boat has set its anchor, deployed its fenders, and is prepared to accept boats that will tie on to it, the Raft Captain will notify the members of the fleet that they may join the raft.

- When approaching the rafting site, arriving boats should hail the Raft Captain on **Channel 67** for final information, directions and rafting instructions.
- Boats usually join a raft on a first-come-first-served basis but size/weight considerations take precedence.
- A boat already in the raft is designated as an inside or receiving boat.
- A boat joining the raft is referred to as an outside or arriving/approaching boat.
- When a boat has been designated as next to join the raft, it approaches on the side of the raft (port or starboard) specified by the Raft Captain.
- The arriving boat should visually and verbally verify that the inside boat is ready to receive it.
- The boat joining the raft will deploy its 2 largest fenders facing the inside boat. Fenders should be rigged prior to approaching the raft.
- Approach the raft from astern at the lowest speed that will still provide adequate control of the boat.
- A crewmember of the approaching boat should be at or near the bow ready to toss the working end of the bow line to crew stationed amidships on the receiving boat.
- Once the bow line is passed to the receiving boat, the stern line is then passed to the receiving boat.
- While parallel to the inside boat, the approaching boat should coast to a stop. Limit use of the engine in reverse due to “prop walk” that may cause the approaching boat to collide with the receiving boat.
- The approaching boat should stand off at some small distance (approximately three to five feet) and the bow and stern breast lines should be used to pull the outside boat to the raft.
- The arriving boat should be under control of its skipper and crew at all times while approaching and must not power into position anticipating that one or both crews will arrest boat motion and bring the boat under control.
- With the crews making sure that the fenders are effectively placed, the bow and stern lines are made secure with a properly tied cleat hitch on each boat.
- Position adjustments should only be made by the outside boat.
- **Skippers of each boat should ensure that the cleating is to their satisfaction. By cleating, rather than using a loop, either boat can free itself up at any time during the raft-up.**
- Spring lines are applied to minimize back and forth surging motion between the boats, establish desired relative fore and aft position, and to ensure that the athwart ships plane of the masts and spreaders are separated by at least 2 feet.

Modifying a Raft: If a boat has special rafting needs or desires to break off prior to the time the raft will be breaking up, the Raft Captain should be so informed prior to joining so those special needs can be accommodated.

Breaking Up a Raft: While most rafts stay together throughout the night, severe weather, storm threat, and potential for a raft dragging anchor or excessive boat motion are causes for breaking up

the raft. The Raft Captain decides if and when a raft will break up, and has the responsibility to communicate clearly the decision to all boats in the raft.

Rafting Dos: Before joining a raft make sure that:

- You have the “go-ahead” from the Raft Captain;
- You have identified the location of the inside boat;
- You have communicated with the inside boat she is ready to receive you.
- You have at least 2 large fenders on board. Use other fenders as you deem prudent including buffering the boat that will raft to you.
- Your fenders are placed at the points of greatest contact.
- You have 4 docking lines on board and ready to throw to the inside boat. The lines should be long enough to act as bow and stern breast lines and fore and aft spring lines with the boat you’re rafting up to.
- Your boat is under control when pulling alongside, parallel to the receiving boat. Rather than “bulling” into the inside boat and its fenders, err on the side of caution and rely on crewmembers to toss and catch lines to pull the arriving boat to the inside boat. Try for a distance of 3-5 feet between boats.
- If you can’t approach properly due to wind or other conditions break off and try again.

After joining a raft make sure that:

- The captains of adjoining boats approve how the docking lines they share are cleated.
- That no portions of the masts, spreaders and shrouds of adjoining boats share the same ships athwart plane. Shift position as needed, and monitor for changes of position while in the raft.
- The approaching boat should keep its engine running, but out of gear, until after docking is completed.
- As soon as possible after your boat is secured, stand by to receive the next arriving boat.
- After batteries are charged, all engines, including generators, should be shut down for the duration of the raft.

Rafting Don’ts

- Don’t power up to the raft expecting others to arrest and control your boat.
- Don’t inch up to the stern of the inside boat expecting others to pull your boat into position.
- Don’t use loops to secure docking lines at any time on any boat in the raft.
- Don’t run you engine as others may want to swim or keep their hatches and/or portholes open.

Any damage done to the receiving boat is the responsibility of the approaching boat. Be slow, be careful, and be safe.

While in the Raft: You didn't go through all that time and trouble to join a raft just to undo all those lines and go your respective ways. You did it to share time and space with the people who are on the other boats in the raft-up. How well you share that time and space is what determines the success of the raft-up and, ultimately, the success of the cruise itself.

The Welcome Mat: From the moment your boat is tied into the raft, an implied welcome is extended to the rest of the raft-up. Joining a raft is an implicit invitation to all others in the raft to come by and visit. Likewise, recognize that all the other welcome mats are out for you and your crew. A raft-up is a combination of the friendliness of a backyard barbeque, the closeness of a fireside chat, and the camaraderie that comes from having a special interest you can share with only a few.

Privacy: Once the raft is established, when crossing other boats, always walk around the deck in front of the mast to respect the privacy of those on board. Should the folks on the boat you're crossing over prefer that you tiptoe through the cockpit, respect that preference. Also, try to step lightly, so as not to disturb those whose sleep patterns may be different from yours. Remember to keep your music as well as VHF announcements (oh those cockpit radios!) pretty much to yourself.

Sharing: It may not have been obvious when you came into the raft-up that you were going to share your time, your boat, your food, your expertise, your library, and your tools and equipment with the others in the raft. But you are! Rare is the raft-up where a gear or electronics problem someone is having doesn't surface, where a tool you thought you had on board you now have to prevail upon someone else for, or information that you need may be found in someone's on-board library.

However, of all the things shared in a raft-up the most frequent is food. It is an integral part of rafting to bring food to share with others and, conversely, to share in the food others have brought. In bringing food, try to impress the people you're bringing it for – make them feel that they're worth the cost and preparation time – revel in their enjoyment of it. The quality of what you have brought and the effort you have invested to prepare it is never lost on those who share it with you.

There are typically three ways, all of which are in some way pre-announced, in which food is shared:

Snacks & Hors D'oeuvres Bring whatever you want but avoid setting an unopened jar or sealed bag on the table.

Pot Luck It's the entrée plus a side dish, possibly salad, you would have eaten had the raft-up not materialized. Bring enough for those on board your boat.

Covered Dish This one takes the most planning. Everyone is assigned something to bring, the sum of which is a well-rounded meal.

Courtesy Being together in a raft-up is like sharing a large room with everyone having their own private cubbyhole. You shouldn't feel like you're walking on eggshells but on the other hand, you should respect the property of others. This extends not only to their boats and gear but also to food serving items. When eating, watch your spills and, in particular, take care when drinking red wine (stains the deck and gelcoat).

Good sailing and good cruising are the results of proper planning, informed execution, communication and cooperation. Let's hope that every RSPS cruise makes us look forward to the next one.