

# Flares

12 December 2010  
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RYA - Royal Yachting Association



## Flares

*Flares essentially allow you shout for help and indicate where you are.*

*For pleasure vessels of 13.7m in length and over the carriage of flares is mandatory under the Merchant Shipping Regulations.*

*Smaller craft must decide what is appropriate for their boating.*

Although DSC VHF Radios and EPIRB are now more likely to be the first choice to "shout for help", viable alternatives to a flares as an effective means of indicating that you are the yacht with the white hull and white sails in crowded waters are less readily available.

The most effective use for parachute rocket flares is to raise the alarm, especially at night and when other vessels may be in sight of it or when near the coast. A very bright flare which burns as it drifts down on a parachute is projected to a height of around 300m. Such flares can be visible for considerable distances and possibly as far as 28 miles.

For location, handheld red flares tend to be used at night and orange smoke signals during the day. They may be used to indicate distress if you are in sight of another vessel but can also indicate your position when help is on the way. Where space is of the essence a day and night flare may be of interest. This is a single tube which contains both a red flare and an orange smoke signal, but with a shorter burn time. This is just one of a range of items that are suitable for keeping on your person.

White flares are used to draw attention to your vessel's presence, for example in a potential collision situation where the other vessel does not appear to have seen you. These flares should be kept readily to hand and should ideally be stored separately to your distress flares. A powerful torch which could for example be shined onto the main sail of a yacht may be a suitable alternative.

Flares should be kept readily to hand, somewhere cool and dry as they will degrade in a damp, salty atmosphere. Ideally they will be protected from extremes of temperature and will not be left to rattle around in an unpadded canister.

It has been common practice for pleasure boaters to carry their old flares as a back up to their in date flares. This is not a practice the RYA endorses. Out of date flares become progressively less reliable and lose their colour, brilliancy and burn-time. An out of date flare may fail to operate as specified if it is used after its expiry date. It is possible that a manufacturer or insurer might avoid a claim concerning a malfunctioning flare if it has expired.

Firing even an in date flare is potentially hazardous and their carriage results in disposal problems as they have a limited life. Once out of date they must be disposed of correctly. It is illegal to dump pyrotechnics at sea, illegal to dump them on land and illegal to let them off in anything other than an emergency.

For the RYA's latest guidance on what flares you should carry see the page on **Emergency Distress Alerting**.