Giving Assistance to Other Vessels

Safety at Sea Seminar
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Giving Assistance is International Law

"The master of a ship at sea which is in a position to be able to provide assistance, on receiving a signal from any source that persons are in distress at sea, is bound to proceed with all speed to their assistance, if possible informing them or the SAR service that the ship is doing so. If the ship receiving the distress alert is unable or, in the special circumstances of the case, considers it unreasonable or unnecessary to proceed to their assistance, the master must enter in the log-book the reason for failing to proceed to the assistance of the persons in distress and, taking into account the recommendations of the Organization, inform the appropriate SAR service accordingly."

-International Maritime Law

It's also US Law

"A master or individual in charge of a vessel shall render assistance to any individual found at sea in danger of being lost, so far as the master or individual in charge can do so without serious danger to the master's or individual's vessel or individuals on board. (46 USC 2304(a)(1)).

It's also in the Race Rules of Sailing

"A boat or competitor shall give all possible help to any person or vessel in danger"
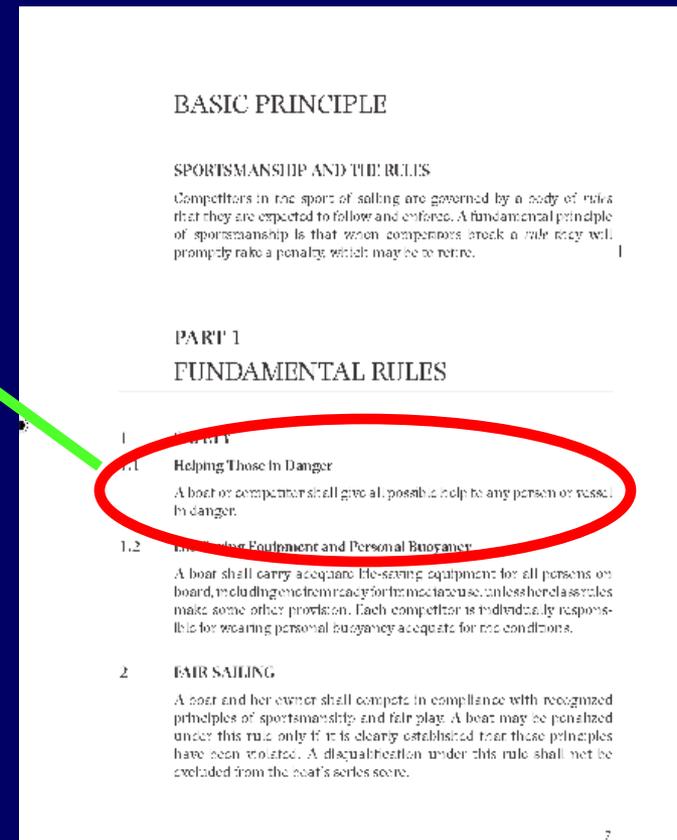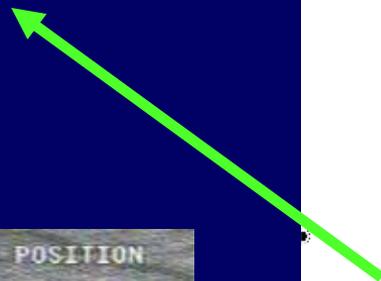
The moral imperative

A moral imperative is a principle originating inside a person's mind that compels them to act.

A moral imperative is often confused with an ethical obligation, rather than a basic function of the human mind. Morals are distinct from ethics by their innate origin, while ethics originate from somewhere or someone, not the person who has that ethic. Imperatives transcend obligations or responsibilities, outside the possibility of choice.

From Wikipedia "Moral Imperative"

What are your obligations?

- Lend assistance if you can
- Respond to emergency communications
- Log your actions in a logbook

Stages of a typical rescue

- Awareness
- Contact
- Analyze your ability to respond
- Calculate the distance and time to be onsite
- If racing, log the time and place where you stopped racing
- Make way to the vessel in distress
- Stand by the vessel in distress
- Maintain communication with rescue agencies
- Transfer crew if necessary

How can you help?

- Shelter
- Man overboard
- Medical assistance/supplies
- Radio relay to shore station, vessel, or aircraft
- Stand-by and provide comfort/support
- Provide technical or mechanical skills
- Supply equipment for repairs
- Supply fuel or water
- Provide crew member

Examples of giving assistance

- Providing a fuel pump to a boat returning from Baja California, MX (Cabo Race, 1982)

- Standing by after losing a keel (Transpac, 1983)

- Joining in a search for a man overboard (King Harbor Race, 2008)

- Rescuing crew from an inverted sailboat (Chicago Mac Race, 2011)

- Offering assistance to a vessel without a rudder (Islands Race, 2013)
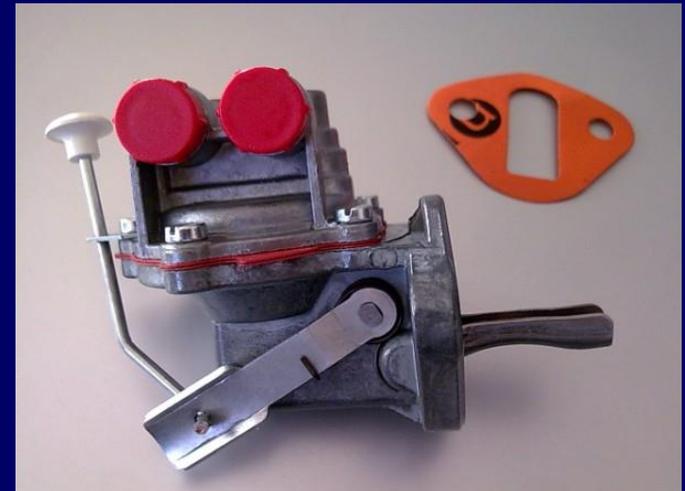
How much risk is too much risk?

- Take "prudent risks to assist the other crew
- Both proximity and ability are required
- "without serious damage…to vessel or individuals
- A great reason to have your own vessel under control

Maneuvering close to a sinking vessel

- Why?
  - Communication
  - Transfer of crew or gear
  - Passing a line
- Use a dinghy
- Toss a line directly
- Float a line downwind on a fender

Towing another vessel

- Watch out for snap-back
- Use of bridles
- Make towlines fast to very strong points
- Single- or double-braid nylon
- Try differing towline lengths and towing speeds

In conclusion…

- It's the law
- Right thing to do
- Time-honored tradition
- Karma