



THE BLUE SIGN

In the Netherlands

On major Dutch rivers you can encounter a blue sign. This signals a starboard-to-starboard meeting.

Right of way

Traffic on major Dutch rivers is subject to either the Inland Waterways Police Regulations (BPR) or the Rhine Navigation Police Regulations (RPR).

On waterways where the BPR applies, vessels that remain starboard will always have right of way. Therefore, it's generally recommended to keep to starboard side. There are a few BPR waterways where a small vessel is not just recommended but *required* to drive starboard. These can be found in the (Dutch) [BPR - appendix 15a](#).

The right of way rule differs on RPR waterways. On these waters a large vessel will always have right of way over a small vessel.

Glossary

Large vessel the vessel is more than 20 metres long

Small vessel the vessel is less than 20 metres long*

Major rivers in BPR areas Geldersche IJssel, Maas

Major rivers in RPR areas Boven-Rijn, Waal, Pannerdensch Kanaal, Neder-Rijn, Lek

**There are exceptions. Consult the regulations.*

Dutch rivers

On the following major Dutch rivers large vessels are allowed to keep either starboard or port: Boven-Rijn, Waal, Pannerdensch Kanaal, Neder-Rijn, Lek, Geldersche IJssel and Maas.

Due to the strong current that can occur on these rivers, it can be more convenient for a large vessel to keep to the inside bend when going upstream. This sometimes means vessels will meet starboard-to-starboard instead of port-to-port. To signal a starboard-to-starboard meeting on Dutch rivers, a large vessel will display a blue sign.

Blue sign

The blue sign can only be displayed by large vessels and has to meet certain requirements. The blue sign will always be surrounded by white, blinking lights. As an easy point of reference: you're expected to pass the vessel on the side where the blue sign is displayed.

A large vessel going upstream signals to an oncoming vessel going downstream it wants to meet starboard-to-starboard. If the vessel going downstream is also a large vessel, it will display a blue sign in response. This signals the message is understood and a starboard-to-starboard passing will occur.

A small vessel is not allowed to have a blue sign. It will respond by clearly and deliberately altering its course or respond via VHF radio before altering course.

Maintaining starboard

A large vessel that is going upstream must allow a suitable passageway for vessels going downstream. In BPR areas, this is true whether the vessel going downstream is large or small. The suitable passageway

can be on either the port or starboard side of the vessel.

Though it is preferable to meet an upstream going vessel starboard-to-starboard when it displays a blue sign, there are occasions when you are allowed to keep starboard. This is solely when you do not deem it safe enough to cross the river to meet starboard-to-starboard. In these cases, go firmly to starboard. The large vessel has to create a suitable passageway.

VHF

If you happen to have a marine VHF radio, you can use it to communicate with the vessel that wants to meet starboard-to-starboard.

Keep in mind that you're only allowed to use your VHF radio in the Netherlands when you have registered its use, and your (international) operating certificate is verified by the Dutch authorities.

Sound signal

A sound signal can be used in case of an emergency. When the large vessel going upstream displaying its blue sign does not see the oncoming vessel changing course (or any other sign it understood the message), it may use a sound signal to communicate how to pass. The usual sound signals apply:

- **One short blast:** pass me port-to-port.
- **Two short blasts:** pass me starboard-to-starboard.

Respond in kind to signal the message is understood.

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