

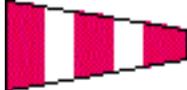
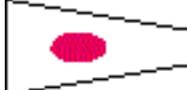
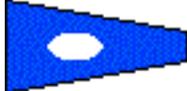
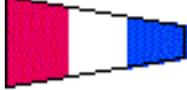
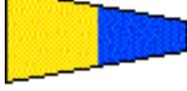
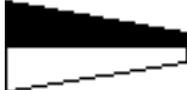
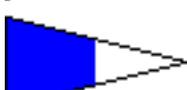
International Code Flags or Signaling Flags

More than you ever wanted to know:

Although you may never see them displayed except at fleet parades, around naval installations, and areas with heavy international shipping traffic, International code flags are used to signal between two ships or between ship and shore. Also called signaling flags, they are a set of flags of different colors, shapes and markings which used singly or in combination have different meanings. The flags include 26 square flags which depict the letters of the alphabet, ten numeral pendants, one answering pendant, and three substituters or repeaters.

Only a few colors can be readily distinguished at sea. These are: red, blue, yellow, black, and white; and these cannot be mixed indiscriminately. You will notice, for clarity, the flags shown are either red and white, yellow and blue, blue and white, or black and white; besides plain red, white, and blue.

One-flag signals are urgent or very common signals (see meanings below). Two-flag signals are mostly distress and maneuvering signals. Three-flag signals are for points of the compass, relative bearings, standard times, verbs, punctuation, also general code and decode signals. Four-flags are used for geographical signals, names of ships, bearings, etc. Five-flag signals are those relating to time and position. Six-flag signals are used when necessary to indicate north or south or east or west in latitude and longitude signals. Seven-flags are for longitude signals containing more than one hundred degrees.

	Alfa Diver Down Keep Clear		November No		Answering Pendant
	Bravo Dangerous Cargo		Oscar Man Overboard		0
	Charlie Yes		Papa About to Sail		1
	Delta Keep Clear		Quebec Request Pratique		2
	Echo Altering Course to Starboard		Romeo		3
	Foxtrot Disabled		Sierra Engines Going Astem		4
	Golf Want a Pilot		Tango Keep Clear		5
	Hotel Pilot on Board		Uniform Standing into Danger		6
	India Altering Course to Port		Victor Require Assistance		7
	Juliett On Fire Keep Clear		Whiskey Require Medical Assistance		8
	Kilo Desire to Communicate		X-ray Stop Your Intention		9
	Lima Stop Instantly		Yankee Am Dragging Anchor		1st
	Mike I am Stopped		Zulu Require a Tug		2nd
					3rd

Some Useful Two Letter Signals:

AC - I am abandoning my vessel.

LO - I am not in my correct position: *used by a light vessel.*

RU - Keep clear of me; I am maneuvering with difficulty.

AN - I need a doctor.

NC - I am in distress and require immediate assistance.

SO - You should stop your vessel instantly.

BR - I require a helicopter.

PD - Your navigation lights are not visible.

UM - the Harbour is closed to traffic.

CD - I require immediate assistance.

PP - Keep well clear of me.

UP - Permission to enter Harbour is urgently requested. I have an emergency.

DV - I am drifting.

QD - I am going ahead.

YU - I am going to communicate with your station by means of the International code of signals.

EF - SOS/MAYDAY has been canceled.

QT - I am going astern.

ZD1 - Please report me to the Coast Guard, New York

FA - Will you give me my position?

QQ - I require health clearance.

ZD2 - Please report me to Lloyds, London.

GW - Man overboard. Please take action to pick him up.

QU - Anchoring is prohibited.

ZL - Your signal has been received but not understood.

JL - You are running the risk of going aground.

QX - I request permission to anchor.

Flag Courtesy:



U.S. National Ensign & Merchant Flag



U.S. Yacht Ensign

It is usually appropriate to fly the U.S. National Ensign (flag) or U.S. Yacht Ensign at the stern of your vessel. However, when operating internationally, say going to the Bahamas, once in foreign waters you are required to fly the "Q" Flag or "Quarantine Flag" until you have cleared customs. This flag should be hoisted on the starboard spreader. If you are on a power boat with no mast, the "Q" flag can be displayed on the bow. It is also customary to fly the country's courtesy flag when operating in the waters of that country. After clearing customs, the "Q" flag should be replaced with the country's courtesy flag.

Don't fly a foreign courtesy ensign after you have returned to U.S. waters. It may show that you have "been there," but it is not proper flag etiquette.

Customs regulations and clearance procedures and costs may differ from one foreign country to another. Be sure and check your cruising guide for the proper procedures or try inquiring locally by radio prior to entering a foreign port. Although I have found that most custom officials speak some English or have access to someone who does, don't forget that you are in their country and you should be prepared to communicate with them in their language.

So, now that you know all about signaling flags, get them out and wave them high.

Related Articles:

What does it mean to ["Dress Ship"](#) and how do you do it?

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"Dressing Ship"

We get many questions and requests every week concerning all kinds of matters related to boating. The following question came from Jehanne.

"I live in Annapolis, Maryland. Yesterday we welcomed the Whitbread racers to town. As part of that welcoming the AYC requested that members "dress ship" with nautical signal flags placed in a certain order. I am curious about the specific order... Can you help me with this issue? Please email me if you can help. Thank you. Sincerely, JME"



"Dressing Ship" is done with the International Code Signal Flags. Officer's flags, club burgees and national flags are not used. The ship is dressed at 0800 and remains dressed until evening colors (at anchor only, except for a vessels maiden or final voyage).

The Yacht Ensign is hoisted at the stern staff and the Union Jack may be displayed at the bow staff. A rainbow of International Code flags are then arranged from the waterline forward to the waterline aft. Flags and pennants are bent on alternately. Since there are twice as many letter flags as numeral pennants, it is good practice to follow a sequence of two flags, one pennant, two flags, one pennant, etc. The sequence of flags can be any order but the following is recommended to give a harmonious color pattern.

Starting forward: AB2,UJ1, KE3, GH6, IV5, FL4, DM7, PO Third Repeater, RN First Repeater, ST Zero, CX9, WQ8, ZY Second Repeater.

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