

AIDS TO NAVIGATION (ATONs)

By Keith Wohltman - U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 95 –

MARCO ISLAND, FL – We live on an island. While that may not be news, it does create a bit of an issue if you pilot your boat on the Marco River. To understand this issue, you need to know how to safely navigate the waters around Marco. But how do we know when we are in a safe passageway?

The waters of the United States and its territories are marked to assist navigation by the U.S. Aids to Navigation System. This system employs a simple arrangement of colors, shapes, numbers and light characteristics to mark navigable channels, waterways and obstructions adjacent to these.

Aids to Navigation can provide a boater with the same type of information drivers get from street signs, stop signals, road barriers, detours and traffic lights. These aids may be anything from lighthouses, to minor lights, day beacons, range lights, and sound signals, to lighted or unlighted buoys. Each has a purpose and helps in determining location, getting from one place to another or staying out of danger. The goal of the U.S. Aids to Navigation System is to promote safe navigation on the waterway.

So, what does this mean for Marco River? Because we are an island, when you travel on the Marco River on one part you are heading in from the gulf, and then you reach a point where you are heading back to the gulf. The colored markers actually switch sides. The old 3R's rule that all boaters know, is "Red, Right, Returning." This means you keep the Red Triangle Markers on the right side of your boat when you return from sea. If you keep driving on the Marco River, at a specific location you will need to keep the Green Square Markers on the right side of your boat.



Photo courtesy of: "Roo's Doins", Manatee County, FL

How do you know when that needs to take place? There are several clues based on the numbers posted on the markers (yes, those numbers are important), but the easiest way to remember is that it takes place at the Judge S. S. Jolley Bridge. We like to remind folks that on the Marco River, it is **“Red on the Right, heading toward the Jolley Bridge”**

The U.S. Aids to Navigation System is intended for use with Nautical Charts. Charts are one of the most important tools used by boaters for planning trips and safely navigating waterways. Charts show the nature and

shape of the coast, buoys and beacons, depths of water, land features, directional information, marine hazards and other pertinent information. This valuable information cannot be obtained from other sources, such as a road map or atlas. These charts are also presented on your boat's GPS or Chart Plotter.

Basic understanding of Aids to Navigation can be learned if you take a safe boating course such as the Coast Guard Auxiliary's **Boating Skills and Seamanship** and our **Boater's Local Knowledge**. For more information, or to register for these and other safe boating courses, contact Joe Riccio, (239)-384-7416 or CGAUXCOURSES@GMAIL.COM.

To schedule your **FREE** Vessel Safety Check, please call: John Moyer, (239)-248-7078 or Coast Guard Auxiliary Station – Flotilla 95, (239) 394-5911 or email John at jmoyer1528@aol.com.

For those interested in joining Flotilla 95, USCG Auxiliary, please call Bob Shmihluk at (215) – 694-3305

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