

Drawbridge Safety

Drawbridges are marvels of machinery which save the expense of building high rise fixed bridges and benefit motorists as well as boaters alike. However, when you drive or walk across a drawbridge or pilot your boat under a drawbridge there are some safety tips you should keep in mind.

Safety tips for Motorists

A drawbridge can be opened day or night. Anytime is drawbridge time.

When you see the yellow diamond “Draw Bridge Ahead” warning sign, approach the drawbridge with caution at a safe speed. This will give you plenty of reaction time if in the event you have to stop.

NEVER stop on the movable steel grid deck or movable concrete deck of a drawbridge. If your vehicle breaks down on the steel grid deck get out of the vehicle immediately and move to the fixed concrete deck portion of the drawbridge. Stay within view of the bridge tender.

Most drawbridges have a traffic signal that is like a regular traffic signal; however, you will see a “Drawbridge Signal” sign mounted alongside the signals. If the signal turns yellow as you start crossing stop at the stop bar just before the gates if you can. Once the signal turns red you **must** stop at the stop bar just before the gates; you are then prohibited from crossing the drawbridge at this point.

Gates similar to railroad crossing gates are lowered for your safety when a drawbridge needs to be opened. If the gates are down when you approach a drawbridge, stay in place and do not proceed until the bridge tender raises the gates.

Safety tips for Pedestrians

Like the safety tips for motorists, a drawbridge can be opened day or night. Anytime is drawbridge time.

Always use the sidewalk provided and not the roadway.

Cross a drawbridge with your shoes on. During the summer the steel grid deck can get hot to the touch, especially in the heat of the day.

NEVER stand on the movable steel grid deck or the movable concrete deck of the drawbridge. The steel grid deck and its surrounding area is a dangerous place to be when the bridge has to be opened.

If you are on the steel grid deck and you hear the horn sound, immediately continue across the steel grid deck or concrete deck until you are completely across and past the gates. The bridge tender cannot open the bridge until you are past the gates.

When the drawbridge is being opened, wait behind the vehicle gate or the pedestrian gate. NEVER walk around a drawbridge gate; not only it's illegal the area beyond the gates is very dangerous. Wait until the gates are raised before you cross.

No trespassing means that. This sign marks an area which is dangerous to the public and only authorized personnel are permitted. That sign is placed there for your safety.

Safety tips for Boaters

NEVER fish anywhere under the drawbridge, especially the ends on either side of the movable steel grid or concrete deck. These ends are the counterweights and rotate downward when the bridge is opened. The area where the counterweights are located is a hazard.

When you approach the drawbridge and you need an opening, sound your horn by means of a long blast and a short blast or you may contact the bridge tender on marine VHF Channel 9. If you have to wait for an opening always maintain control of your boat and remain in the immediate vicinity of the drawbridge until it is opened.

NEVER pass under a drawbridge when it is in the process of being opened or closed. When you come upon a drawbridge already opened always signal your intentions to the bridge tender via horn signal or marine radio. Be careful when you hear the five short horn blasts from the bridge tender when the bridge is open – this means that the bridge tender must lower the drawbridge to allow vehicular and pedestrian traffic to pass.

If your boat has elements which can temporarily lowered to pass through a drawbridge, you are legally obligated to do so. It is a violation of Federal Law to request a drawbridge opening when your boat has elements that can be easily lowered to pass. The bridge tender can get your boat's name and description and report you to the United States Coast Guard; the end result can be a civil penalty being assessed. Besides, an unnecessary drawbridge

opening results in major inconveniences for motorists and pedestrians; an emergency vehicle such as Fire/Rescue or EMS cannot cross a drawbridge when it is opened.

The Cardinal Rule of Drawbridge Safety

It is better to be late a few minutes to your destination whether it be by land or sea. There is no time saved by trying to beat the drawbridge; the cost can be the potential of a human life which naturally cannot be replaced.

© 2007 Edward Ringwald
Revised October 2024