



Understanding NOAA Chart Symbolology



Anchorage and Harbors of Refuge

Reported Anchorage: The anchor symbol has been used for decades to represent an anchorage on U.S. nautical charts, but the specific meaning of the symbol has evolved over the years. A review of the last three editions of U.S. Chart No. 1 shows how the symbol itself and its intended purpose have changed. The 1997 edition shows three symbols that may still appear on older editions of charts, but are now considered obsolete and are being replaced as new editions of charts are published. In the past, distinct symbols differentiated anchorages for small and large vessels. This is no longer the case. **The single black anchor symbol  now represents non-regulated anchorages of unspecified size and shape.**

U.S. Chart No. 1 Edition	Symbol Number	Symbol	Description
Ed. 12, 2013	N 10		Reported Anchorage (no defined limits)
Ed. 11, 2011	N 10		Anchorage
Ed. 10, 1997	N 10		Anchorage (large vessels)
			Anchorage (small vessels)

Harbor of Refuge: The black anchor symbol is occasionally mistaken as showing a "harbor of refuge," used by vessels in distress or during bad weather. This has never been the case; there is no symbol representing "harbors of refuge" on NOAA charts. Defining and charting what would be an adequate refuge for ships in general is unfeasible, because it depends on the size and characteristics of each ship. A refuge for one type of vessel may be potentially dangerous for another.

Anchor Berths: The black anchor symbol should also not be confused with the anchor berths, which are specific "parking spaces" to which harbor authorities may direct individual ships to anchor. These are shown on NOAA nautical charts with a magenta or green circle, which often encloses the number or letter designation of the berth. These symbols are described in U.S. Chart No. 1 under symbol numbers N 11.1 and N 11.2.

Anchorage with specific limits, usually specified by a government authority, are shown on NOAA nautical charts with either a solid magenta line or a dashed black line. However, NOAA is in the process of replacing these representations with the symbology recommended by the International Hydrographic Organization, shown below and in U.S. Chart No. 1 as symbol N 12.



* U.S. Chart No. 1 is actually not a chart, but a book that describes the symbols used on all nautical charts produced by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). A free copy may be downloaded at <http://www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/mcd/chartno1.htm>