

Seabrook Sailing Club

Guidelines for Operating Safety Boats

1 General

This document was developed to minimize hazards to our sailors and rescue boat crew by offering sound guidelines for safety boat operation. These are guidelines, not rules, because every situation is different, and the safety boat crew must apply their experience and intelligence to each situation to the best of their ability.

1.1 Safety Boat Mission

1.1.1 The safety boat's primary responsibility is to rescue sailors, not boats. Therefore, the safety boat should not attempt to right or tow a boat when there may be other sailors in need.

- If the safety boat is assisting a boat in need, the committee boat should be prepared to investigate any other boats that appear to be in trouble, even if that means abandoning a race.
- We want to avoid this scenario: The wind picks up during a race and Sunfish Sam's outhaul breaks. The safety boat sees him drifting, investigates, and proceeds to tow him to shore. Meanwhile, a gust sends Laser Larry on a high speed downwind capsize. Laser Larry gets knocked on the head and, in a daze, he watches while his boat is blown away from him. A wave breaks over his head, choking him. He panics, thrashes around and begins to drown while the safety boat is towing Sunfish Sam's boat back to the club.

1.1.2 The safety boat crew shall observe and keep track of all boats on the race course, and during their passage to and from the race course.

- Tows shall not be given to late comers. Starting on time is part of racing and the responsibility of the racing sailboat.
- Regularly count the number of boats racing to determine if any are missing.
- Note and report any sailboats leaving the race course early.
- The safety boat is on the job until the last sailboat returns to the club (unless a boat has obviously decided to sail for fun after the races are over).

1.1.3 The safety boat shall assist the principle race officer in setting and maintaining the race course.

1.2 Safety Boat Crew

1.2.1 The safety boat should be crewed by at least two people, one to drive the boat and the other(s) to perform actions as required. A safety boat manned by one person can be dangerous to all parties involved.

1.2.2 An experienced safety officer should be in charge of the safety boat and rescue operations.

1.2.3 The driver should be an experienced power boat operator. Less experienced members of the crew can gain valuable practice by driving the boat in non-rescue situations under the supervision of the experienced driver.

1.2.4 If you feel you are not sufficiently experienced or capable of performing rescue boat duties, please inform the PRO so as to protect the safety of all afloat.

1.3 Safety Boat Equipment

1.3.1 The safety boat should carry the standard power boat equipment (life jackets, flares, fire extinguisher).

- It is good policy for the safety boat crew to always wear their life jackets while under power.

1.3.2 The safety boat should carry the following additional equipment as a minimum:

- Radio
- Throw line with buoyant object
- Drinking water (for crew and rescued sailors)
- Something warm (jacket, blanket, tarp, etc.)
- Tow rope (tied to secure towing connection on the boat)
- Basic tools, including wire cutters

2 Conducting a Rescue

2.1 *Prioritizing Rescues*

2.1.1 When multiple capsizes occur at the same time, the safety officer must prioritize which boat to investigate first. The decision should be made on a number of factors including:

- Weather - In good visibility, it may be obvious that a crew is fine and attempting to right his boat.
- Location of the incident - If the boat is near a shipping channel, there is an increased in risk of being hit by other bay users.
- Experience of the crew - An inexperienced crew may make poor decisions, compounding problems.
- Age of the crew - A young, small sailor may be physically unable to self rescue.
- Type of boat - Some boats are easier to right than others. A two person crew can check on each other.

2.1.2 As long as none of the crew are in immediate danger, each capsized boat should be investigated in turn to ensure the welfare of their crew.

2.2 *Approaching a Capsized Sailboat*

2.2.1 Avoid approaching a capsized sailboat along its previous track as the crew may have been separated from the boat.

2.2.2 Approach the capsized sailboat slowly.

- The wake or wash from the safety boat can cause problems for a disabled boat or crew.
- A slow approach minimizes the chances of running over crew or equipment.

2.2.3 Approach the capsized boat from leeward, to a point ahead of the capsized boat's bow.

- Control of the safety boat is best when pointed straight into the wind.
- There is no chance of the safety boat being blown onto the capsized boat.

- The safety boat is out of the way if the boat is righted.
- Safety personnel will have good visibility of crew in the water on both sides of the capsized boat.

2.3 Assessing a Sailor's Condition

- 2.3.1 Upon arrival at the capsized sailboat, the safety officer must assess the condition of the sailor(s). This may be done verbally or visually. An alert and active sailor attempting to right his boat is a good indication that they are not in distress.
- 2.3.2 Ensure that the crew needs assistance prior to helping. If their condition indicates the need for assistance, do not hesitate to give it.
- 2.3.3 A sailor's judgement can become impaired when he is cold and tired.
- 2.3.4 A sailor may quickly become cold and fatigued and in need of rescue due to a number of factors.
- Water and Air Temperature
 - Fitness Level or Injuries
 - Experience Level
 - Clothing and Gear

2.4 Recovering a Sailor

- 2.4.1 The crew will be disqualified from the race if you give aid.
- 2.4.2 A throw line may be used to pull the sailor to the safety boat. The line should be thrown to the side and beyond the sailor.
- 2.4.3 A throwable floatation device can be thrown to a sailor in need of floatation.
- 2.4.4 The safety boat engine should be turned off when the sailor is boarding the safety boat. At the very least, the engine should be in neutral when the sailor is boarding the safety boat.
- 2.4.5 The sailor should be recovered over the side of the safety boat, never over the bows where they are out of sight of the boat driver, could be injured by the rocking motion of the boat, or could get stuck under the safety boat.

2.4.6 Recovered sailors should be put ashore immediately to avoid overcrowding the safety boat.

2.4.7 Injuries should be treated as necessary and reported to the Board of Governors.

3 Assisting a Sailboat

3.1 When to Attempt Recovery of a Sailboat

3.1.1 In general, recovery of capsized or stranded boats should not be attempted while races are in progress as it may delay or prevent rescue of another sailor in a life threatening situation. There may be exceptions to this, such as if a boat has capsized near a ship channel or near working vessels.

3.1.2 Righting of boat, dropping of sails and leaving at anchor, if time and other incidences permit, is a good use of resources to allow the rescue boat to get back on duty.

3.1.3 No recovery should be attempted without the owner's or skipper's consent.

3.2 Righting a Capsized Boat

3.2.1 Any safety boat crew entering the water to assist in righting a capsized boat must wear a life jacket.

3.2.2 The safety boat may be required to pull a boat loose that has its mast stuck in the mud. The typical position of a stuck sailboat is with the mast pointing downwind and the bottom of the hull facing the wind and waves.

- Discuss the procedure with the sailboat crew. Make sure they are happy with the process.
- In general, it is best to pull the boat so the mast comes out of the mud along its length (like pulling a needle from a pin cushion) to avoid bending the mast.
- The righting rope should be tied to the mast near the gooseneck, then run over the high side of the boat and tied to the safety boat. This minimizes the load on the mast and rigging.

- When pulling, always apply power slowly and in line with the mast. Very little power is required and too much will damage the capsized boat. Be patient and give the mast time to slowly work its way loose from the mud.

3.3 Towing

3.3.1 Towing can put large stresses on sailboats.

- Tow slowly.
- If possible, the tow line should pull from the mast step and pass through the bow fitting.
- Two or three turns of the tow rope around the mast, with the end held by boat's crew, allows the crew to quickly and easily release themselves from the tow boat should problems arise.

3.3.2 When dinghies are being towed, their centerboards should be raised.

3.3.3 Multiple boats can be towed by attaching their painters with a rolling hitch to a long line trailed behind the tow boat. The sailboats should alternate sides of the trailed line.

- Avoid towing multiple boats with each boat attached to the boat in front of them as this requires each boat to carry the combined tow load of all the boats behind it.

3.3.4 One technique for towing Optimists is provided below:

- Each boat has a line tied to the mast step, with a bowline loop tied in the free end.
- The first Opti is pulled by the rescue boat.
- Arrive at the second Opti and thread it's tow line loop through the first Opti's loop at the rescue boat.
- Rescue boat moves away holding onto the second Opti's loop, with the first Opti trailing the second Opti.
- Arrive at the third Opti and thread it's tow line loop through the second Opti's loop at the rescue boat.
- And so on until you have a string of Opties, with the first Opti always at the end of the string furthest from the rescue boat.