

REGATTA SAFETY BOAT COVER

Operational Guidelines.

Boat. RIBs (rigid inflatable boat) are ideal, followed by Dorries and then open boats with sufficient added buoyancy. Size: 5-10 metres. Anything larger and it is difficult to get people out of the water over the sides of the boat.

Equipment carried. Kedge anchor, chain and rope, spare fuel, lifejackets, first aid kit, flare pack for inshore waters, basic tools for engine, VHF radio, radio link to race control and officials, mobile phone in suitable waterproof case. Crew to wear suitable clothing for the conditions and time on the water. Food and water as required.

Engine. Powerful enough to get the boat on to the plane. Must have kill-cord fitted and working.

Crew. Minimum of two, driver and crew, competent to control the boat. One must have valid RYA Level 2 qualification or better, not necessarily the driver but if not driving, is still in command of the boat. Ideally have experience working with and rescuing rowing boats and sculls. It is not the same as a dinghy rescue.

Course cover. To provide safety cover for the regatta, a minimum of two safety boats are required. If there is an incident during a race this can be attended to without stopping the race, as there is a back-up boat.

It is best to zone the course. The start zone and the buoy turn zone. Position a boat in each zone. This is where most incidents will occur. The start safety boat can follow the race up to halfway, then wait for the race to return and follow to the finish. From halfway the buoy turn safety boat waits behind the buoys off the course. As the race turns the buoy, it follows back to halfway, handing over to the start safety boat. Good communications between safety boats, race control and officials is essential.

If there is an incident, the nearest safety boat attends. The other follows the race. Don't follow too closely, and try to keep the safety boat wash to a minimum.

This zonal cover method provides safety boat cover to the whole course, while concentrating on the most vulnerable sites, i.e. start and turn. Also it uses less fuel. It is important not to impede boats with the safety boat wash; we don't want to cause an incident or affect the results.

Boats in difficulty. It is most likely to be a small boat, pair or scull that capsize. It is important to get to the incident quickly, but in control. With sculler or rowers in the water, the safety boat's propeller presents the most danger. By being on the scene quickly, those in the water will feel far less stress. The safety boat crew must make verbal contact with the rower/sculler. They may be fine and wish to continue with the race. If this is the case, do not assist as this will disqualify the boat. However, this is pretty rare. Any rower/sculler that can get back in their boat unaided is unlikely to fall in in the first place.

Rescue – Scull. Having arrived at the scene and ascertained that the sculler requires rescuing, manoeuvre the safety boat so that the engine is away from the sculler in the water. Slowly motor up and as soon as contact is made, put the engine in neutral and stop the engine. Help the sculler into the safety boat.

First priority is to save life. If there is a head injury, problems breathing or cold, showing signs of hypothermia, immediately take the casualty ashore. Radio race control, inform them of the situation. Race control will make all necessary arrangements.

If medical aid is not required, the sculler's first concern is to their scull and especially their seat. These often float off. The best way to recover a scull is to remove the sculls, put them into the safety boat. Holding the riggers, pull the scull alongside the hull of the safety boat. Take sculler and scull ashore. In this configuration the safety boat can motor quickly, but not on the plane. Radio race control to inform them of the situation.

Rescue – Pair. Follow the same procedure as per scull. If urgent medical aid is required take both rowers ashore, leaving the pair. If the pair can make it ashore, give whatever assistance is required and escort them ashore. If they cannot row, get rowers in the safety boat, remove blades and put them in safety boat, and pull the pair by the rigger alongside the safety boat hull, similar to recovering a scull. The pair, being larger, is much harder to manoeuvre at speed. Be careful. Radio race control and inform them of the situation.

Rescue - Coxed Four. Most commonly, the four is swamped, and providing that the bow and stern drums are intact, the four will not sink. They can still row, albeit slowly. Escort the four ashore. Radio race control and they will get the relevant club to help recover crew and boat. Some fours are stern heavy and the stern is below the surface. This can be alarming for the cox, in which case get the cox into the safety boat and escort the four ashore. Again, radio race control.

If rowers are in the water, it may be a capsize and there will be up to five people in the water. This is a dangerous situation. The propeller can easily cut a leg, or worse. Make sure you can see all the crew. They should all be holding on to the four. Don't get too close with the engine running. It is best to manoeuvre up wind, put engine in to neutral, stop the engine and drift down to the four. Probably best to get crew and cox into safety boat, and provided there are no medical issues, tow the four ashore. When safe to do so, inform race control by radio. They will mobilise help to recover the four.

Removing rower from a four . The usual scenario is that a rower is injured or ill. Get the crew to sit at back stops, blades square to the boat. Do not remove blades; all rowers know that the boat would then become unstable, non-rowers won't know this. Approach the four from the side, bow between the blades. Motor so the bow touches the four, safety boat crew can pull on the riggers and help the casualty get in to the safety boat. Ensure they are warm and comfortable and get them ashore quickly. Radio race control, inform them of the situation. The four should be able to row ashore unaided.

Hazards to look out for. Swimmers on the course, in danger of being injured by boats or blades. Politely inform swimmers; most will oblige and get off the course.

Jet skis, powerboats, yachts, paddle boards and canoes can be intercepted before they stray on to the course and impede races. Again, a polite word, informing them there is a regatta taking place, will normally suffice. Any problems with boats going on to the course, remind them there is a Notice to Mariners issued by QHM (Queen's Harbourmaster) permitting the regatta and ordering other boat users to avoid the course. This always works.

Safety boat crew be aware of the situation, weather conditions, sea state, tide and wind. Observe rowers/scullers going afloat and note those with less boat control, or having difficulties lining up at the start. Keep an eye on these during the race.

Slower scullers appreciate the safety boat being near them in rough conditions, especially when they are tired and cold.

Finally, good communications with each other, race control and officials will greatly aid the running of a smooth regatta.

Colin Eales. March, 2018.