

Ontario Sailing sanctions a variety of regattas over the summer, many of which are “age group” related. Since a wide variety of clubs host these events on behalf of Ontario Sailing, there can be a lack of consistency in the way regattas are run. Race Officers can be faced with difficult choices when making on the water decisions concerning the conduct of a race. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide both Race Officers and competitors with consistent race committee practices from event to event.

What is presented here are only guidelines, and they are not intended to replace applicable class rules. Ontario Sailing prescribes minimum certification criteria for the Race Officers and Principal Race Officers who conduct these events. These Race Officers are encouraged to use their judgment and experience when conducting events, but the competitors can legitimately expect consistency throughout a series.

1. Wind Conditions

a) Minimum wind speed – For dinghies - 3 knots to start a race. A starting sequence should not be initiated in speeds less than prescribed. Additionally, this minimum should be sustained across the start area, the course and for the duration of the sequence until all boats have cleared the starting area. Once the race is underway, the time limit and Race Officer’s judgment are determining factors regarding wind speed. **See: 4. c) Shortening Or Abandoning After The Start.**

b) Maximum wind speed – Ontario Sailing prefers to not establish a maximum. The primary concern should be that the conditions remain safe. A consistent twenty knots on flat water, on a warm inland lake, is much different than gusty conditions, with large seas, on Lake Ontario in May. It is each competitor’s responsibility to determine his or her maximum wind speed as it relates to his or her safety in navigating the race course. Especially with very young sailors, the Principal Race Officer should remind all competitors at the Information Meeting, that they should abandon a race if they feel the wind strength is too high for them; and to remind them of the procedures for not starting, abandoning and/or leaving the course and returning to port – when at all possible, notify a R/C boat, a Safety boat, or a coach, even if it is not your own. **See: 4. a) Persistent Shifts.**

2. Course Length

The length of the course will vary depending on such factors as wind and sea conditions. The important consideration is the time required to complete the course. In most cases, a target time of 40 to 50 minutes for the lead boat is appropriate. With multiple classes on a course, this will allow for one complete race approximately every hour. In cases where there is a dying wind, the Race Committee must be prepared to shorten at any mark of the course. **See: 4. c) Shortening Or Abandoning After The Start.**

3. Starting

a) Line Length – 1 to 1.25 times the length of the boat times the number of boats. Use the low end of the range in normal conditions. Use the high end of the range in current, or high winds and seas.

b) Line Bias – Under normal circumstances, start lines should be set square to the wind. When there is a slight variation to the wind (normal), the pin may be favoured, but by no more than 5°. In cases where there is an oscillation (wind shifting back and forth), the course should be set for the mid point of the oscillation. How much oscillation is acceptable is a matter of judgment. Regattas have been successfully run with an oscillation of as much as 25° either side of centre.

There may be exceptional circumstances, in which current or other factors will encourage competitors to favour a particular side of the course. When faced with these unusual conditions, the Race Officer has the prerogative to bias the line to “encourage the fleet to make use of the whole line”. For a variety of reasons, it is unacceptable to have the competitors in a gaggle at one end of the line. In these exceptional circumstances, the Race Officer must remember that their job is to run a fair start. For more on this topic, see the document: Background on Line Bias.

c) Starting Sequence – When the Race Officer has the even distribution along the start line, it is acceptable to then start using “Penalty Prep Flags” for a start, but until that has occurred, they should not be used to manage a fleet. With even distribution along the start line, the normal progression of Prep Flags would be:

- Start Attempt #1 – “P” Flag
- Start Attempt #2 – “I” Flag
- Start Attempt #3 – “I over Z” Flag
- Start Attempt #4 – “Black” Flag

When it has become necessary to use either “I over Z” or a “Black Flag”, on subsequent starts the Race Officer should consider “going back” one penalty flag. For example: In Race # 1 for Flatboard Fifteens, it took “I over Z” to get them started. The Race Officer could try “I” for the first attempt at Race #2.

In extreme cases, when several unsuccessful attempts have been made at starting a Class with the “Black” Flag, and there are other Classes yet to start, the following procedure is appropriate. Lower the 1st Substitute and signal a Postponement (“AP” with two signals). The Race Officer can then begin a start sequence for the next Class in line. Use “AP” rather than abandoning with “N” in these cases, since those Classes already racing will be confused by the three sounds that signal an Abandonment.

As a general note, the fastest boats should start first, i.e. Lasers, then Radials, then Bytes.

4. While Racing

a) Persistent Shifts – There is a difference between an oscillating wind, and a persistent shift. In one, the barn door is swinging back and forth, in the other the door stays put on one side or the other. When there is a persistent shift of 30° or more, then the following is normally the appropriate response:

Time of Shift	Response
i) During the Start Sequence.	Postpone or Abandon
ii) Immediately after the Start.	Abandon
iii) Lead boats one quarter of the way up the first leg.	Abandon
iv) Lead boats half way up the first leg.	Abandon
vi) Lead boats three quarters of the way up the first leg.	Abandon
vii) Established leader, 200 yards from the weather mark.	Change Course for the next leg.

b) Change of Course - If during the race there is a shift of 15° - 20°, there should be a change of course. The Race Committee must therefore be prepared and equipped to do a course change at any mark of the course. While it is true that a trapezoid course does not generally lend itself to a change of course, it is quite possible to change the last leg (from Mark 2 to Mark 3) for those sailing on both the “inner” and “outer”. Otherwise, it is advisable to abandon the race, and reset the course. Only the most experienced of Race Committees can execute a change of course on a trapezoid, during a race.

c) Shortening Or Abandoning After The Start – Rule 32 provides for this, and all of the reasons listed in the rule are acceptable in Ontario Sailing events. However, no race should consist of less than two legs. The short hop from a weather mark to an offset mark, and the reach from Mark 1 to Mark 2 on a trapezoid course are not considered legs in this case.

Excerpt from Rule 32:

- (a) because of an error in the starting procedure,*
- (b) because of foul weather,*
- (c) because of insufficient wind making it unlikely that any boat will finish within the time limit,*
- (d) because a mark is missing or out of position, or*
- (e) for any other reason directly affecting the safety or fairness of the competition,*

or may shorten the course so that other scheduled races can be sailed.

In each of these cases, the Race Officer should exercise their best judgment.