

The first consideration in running any regatta must be the safety of everyone concerned: the competitors, the race committee, and the judges; both on and off of the water. Everything else takes second place. There can be a great deal of pressure on regatta officials to “get the races in”, and everyone wants to have a successful event, but if the conditions aren’t safe, the Postponement Flag should be flying from the flagpole, or racing should be otherwise abandoned. Throughout these documents, you will see the phrase: “The first rule of R/C is safety – come back with the same number of competitors that you started with.” It applies equally to everyone involved with the regatta. As with everything else involved in running a successful event, the key to safety is good planning. What follows are only some suggestions and reminders – for a more extensive reference on the subject, a Safety Manual is available from Ontario Sailing. The best tool in developing a safe environment is good old common sense.

1. On Shore

Safety begins here. While it is recommended that there be a Safety Officer as part of the Regatta Organization (and most clubs already have such a position), everyone should be involved, starting before the regatta begins.

- Is the site safe? One of the first hazards to be mindful of is electricity – it does not mix well with water, or boats. Overhead wires, and unsafe camping conditions with a macramé of extension cords, are an accident waiting to happen.
- Is there a communications plan, including a coordinated approach in the event of an emergency? Are key contacts established, including readily available phones and phone numbers, with 24 hour access?
- Do local authorities know about the event: Ambulance, Fire, Police (including the local Marine Detachment), and Coast Guard Auxiliary. Are they familiar with the site, do they have adequate access, will fire and ambulance routes be maintained during the crowded conditions of a major event?
- Will trained people be onsite to administer First Aid including CPR? Remember there are adults involved, all of whom aren’t in the best of physical condition. Have you considered the local St. John’s Ambulance Branch?
- While the competitors are on the water, does everyone know who the dedicated shore contact is in the event of an emergency. Does everyone know what VHF Channel to use, and/or the appropriate phone number?

2. On The Water

Safety on the water begins onshore. There must be a system of “Checking Out and In” for all competitors, either on a Notice Board, or through the use of “Sea Gulls” – those folks at the entrance to the harbour who record all “comings” and goings”. If a Sign Out system is used, it must be included in the Sailing Instructions. In addition, the Signal Boat and the Safety Boat on each course must have a copy of the Entry List, and they should be made aware of any competitors who did not leave the harbour. They should also know about the unusual medical conditions of any competitors.

It must be clearly understood by everyone that in an emergency, every boat is a Rescue/Safety boat. In addition to dedicated Safety boats, this includes the R/C, Coaches, and any “Parent Support Boats”.

a) The Basics:

- There should be at least one Safety Boat assigned to each course. This boat should be equipped with skilled personnel who are experienced in dealing not just with the boat they are using, but with the small sailboats that they may be required to assist. This Safety Boat must also be equipped with an adequate First Aid kit, more than one VHF radio (handhelds as a backup), a compass, and a GPS.

- Every coach boat should be equipped with highly visible identification (such as a flag), a VHF radio, and an adequate compass. Compliance with these requirements can be encouraged by having a separate registration process for coaches that will include the flag, a plasticized card containing VHF Channels and Emergency Phone Numbers, and an attractive fee that includes their meals.

b) How Many?:

The answer is easy – it depends. A good place to start is with the CYA guideline that says each instructor should be responsible for a maximum of ten boats. Therefore plan on one safety/rescue boat for every ten boats on a course. This may seem to be a rather onerous requirement, but in reality it should not be difficult to achieve. Remember: R/C Mark Set boats count, and Coach boats count. If you have on the water judging, then Jury boats count.

The key to having an adequate number of Safety/Rescue boats is keeping an eye on the weather. If you wait until the line squall hits, maybe one boat per competitor will be enough – maybe. Then again, you might be sending out a boat to rescue both the competitor and their rescue boat.

c) A Weather Watch:

Remember the part about the “dedicated shore contact” ? They are the ideal “look out” for potential weather problems and one of their best resources can be an internet site displaying local weather radar. But remember, local weather can develop quickly on a hot summer’s day, and storms can literally be “under the radar”. The ultimate decision to abandon a race rests with the Race Officer. That decision needs to be supported by everyone involved with the regatta, even when it was overly cautious.

The alternative to a safe regatta is not an option.