

Safety Boat Emergency Protocol

Version 4 - February 2024



Nothing in this protocol should prevent any person involved in an emergency situation from taking reasonable and appropriate action (in accordance with their training and ability) to get a casualty to safety as quickly as possible, keeping others informed of the nature of the casualty and the landing place (as a minimum). For the purposes of this document, an “emergency” is an incident which poses a threat to life, or has the likely potential to do so, and which requires external assistance (from an Ambulance, Lifeboat or Helicopter for example).

Recommended Protocol:

1. In the event of a safety boat recognising an emergency situation the Safety Boat will call the Race Officer (RO) on the club’s working channel and briefly explain the situation and state their intention to call the Coastguard on channel 16. The RO will confirm.
2. (If fitted), the Safety Boat should transmit a DSC Distress Alert whilst alongside casualty vessel.
3. Safety Boat and Race Officer tune to Channel 16. The Safety Boat makes a mayday call with minimum details are as follows:

“Mayday, Mayday, Mayday; this is <yacht club name> safety boat <repeat x3>. Mayday; My Position within Poole Harbour is <coordinates or distance and bearing from a known position>, <Number and type of injuries>; Immediate assistance required; Over”.

 - Note: There should be a laminated prompt card on safety boats. Clubs can require trained safety boat operators to use the full MIRPDANIO framework (or equivalent) if preferred but they should consider if this will create extra undue delay.

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4. The Coastguard is now in direct contact with the Safety Boat on scene and can glean any further required information in order to conduct an effective rescue with the correct asset(s) and also organise an ambulance.
5. This call should have been heard by Harbour Control who monitors Ch16 in addition to Ch14. However, if Harbour Control are transmitting on Ch 14 at the time of the Mayday, Ch 16 will be temporarily automatically muted so the RO should arrange for a brief further call to be made to Harbour Control on Ch14 to get positive confirmation they are aware of the incident and will be actively participating on Ch16.
6. As the RO and the Harbour Control are monitoring, they can offer support or additional information (i.e. number of competitors & safety craft available / shipping movements); once the Coastguard have assumed control, the RO is relieved of their duty of care in respect of the rescue of this casualty and can focus on his responsibilities towards the rest of the participants. RO should consider appropriateness of abandoning racing to ensure clear water and minimal distractions
7. The Coastguard are aware and accept that they may be talking to the safety boat crew (rather than the Coxswain) who may not hold a VHF licence (this is permitted in distress situations under Article 47.2 of the Radio Regulations).
8. Remembering that this is an Emergency situation, communications remain on Ch16 until such time that HMCG specifies an alternative vhf channel. All transmissions should be prefixed with the word Mayday.
 - Note: HM Coastguard only has one VHF aerial that reliably covers all of Poole Harbour so dual channel working for the Coastguard is rare.
9. To aid in identification, the safety boat should have a buoyant orange smoke float available and should inform Coastguard if deployed.
10. Repatriation points that all, including the emergency services, are familiar with should be used. Where there are fatalities then busy public areas should be avoided i.e. not Poole Quay Boat Haven. Recommended points:

National Trust Jetty, N Haven	BH13 7QJ	
Royal Motor Yacht Club	54 Panorama Rd BH13 7RE	01202 707227
Parkstone Yacht Club	Pearce Avenue BH14 8EH	01202743610
Poole Yacht Club	New Harbour Rd. BH15 4AQ	01202672687 / 01202680202
Poole Quay Boat Haven	The Quay BH15 1HJ	01202649488

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Training exercises should be conducted to ensure that the protocol is understood and refined and to reinforce confidence in non-professional parties. This should take the form of practical and/or table top as deemed necessary.

HM Coastguard and Harbour Control to be advised of club racing programmes to enable them to respond to calls from members of the public by being better informed.

The advantages of this method are:

- Coastguard immediately in contact with first informant and can obtain all the info they and Ambulance / hospital need.
- No delays introduced by relaying through RO and Harbour Control
- No interpretations or mistakes introduced by relaying through RO or Harbour Control
- Coastguard now in constant contact with first informant on scene.
- RNLI or helicopter in constant contact with first informant as soon as they launch
- All parties kept updated
- As this is on an open VHF channel, others are kept informed and can contribute (negates the one-to-one closed network caused by phone calls)
- The RO can concentrate on their other participants
- Harbour Control can concentrate on their priorities

The disadvantages of this method are:

- The Coastguard may end up talking to someone who is not very familiar with VHF procedures (but in truth they are used to that).
- The safety boat crew will be outside their comfort zone of VHF Channel M

Note: Since February 2005 it has no longer been a requirement for vessels to monitor VHF Ch16 where impractical to do so. However, Poole Harbour Control and HM Coastguard do monitor VHF Channel 16.

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Annex: Background Information

Prior to the introduction of this protocol in 2013 (originally named the Small Craft Emergency Protocol) there were a number of Incidents within Poole Harbour, some involving the local Yacht Clubs, and others not, where the communications and co-ordination of the Incident has fallen short of the desired standard and as a consequence parties involved have had to work much harder to bring the incident to a successful conclusion; furthermore it is recognised that because of the breakdown of communications it is possible that the casualty's life may have been placed at additional risk. This is not appropriate, and this paper serves to address that shortfall by aiming to reduce the significant potential for misinterpretation or miscommunication in the chain between Safety Boats, Race Officers (RO), Harbour Control, HM Coastguard and attending Search and Rescue (SAR) assets who use a number of different VHF channels and/or phone contact. Equally, the Race Officer may be distracted from their first duty of care to the other participants and Harbour Control (HC) has been distracted from their primary responsibilities of over-seeing the movements of large traffic.

The Merchant Shipping Act, International Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea and Radio Regulations define an Emergency as "Grave and imminent danger to a person, ship, aircraft or other mobile unit requiring immediate assistance".

Accordingly, routine uninjured person-in-water, dismastings and capsizes, etc. shall be handled by the Race Officer in accordance with the Risk Assessment and Safety Plan, and are not the domain of this paper.

Consultees:

Poole Harbour Commissioners
Poole Yachting Association
HM Coastguard
RNLI
RYA

Reviews:

This document should be reviewed following exercises, relevant incidents and at least every 4 years. The most recent review was conducted in 2024. Other than minor updates, the document was also renamed the Safety Boat Emergency Protocol for clarity due to the heavy focus on the Race Officer / Safety Boat relationship. However, when ignoring the role of the Race Officer, this protocol for Safety Boats is equally applicable for any small craft first on scene to an unreported incident.

Role and Responsibilities:

HM Coastguard is responsible for the initiation and co-ordination of all civilian maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) within the UK Maritime Search and Rescue

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Region. This includes the mobilisation, organisation and tasking of adequate resources to respond to persons either in distress at sea, or to persons at risk of injury or death on the cliffs or shoreline of the United Kingdom.

Poole Harbour Commissioners' overall objective, and their Mission Statement, is: "to promote the safe and sustainable use of Poole Harbour, balance the demands on its natural resources, develop strategic infrastructure, work closely with our stakeholders, support the safe management of appropriate activities within the Harbour, and work strategically with key agencies in order to manage the Harbour in a sustainable and responsible manner." Additionally, with specific reference to the Leisure Sector: "to support initiatives to improve the marine safety management of Poole Harbour to the benefit of its stakeholders; and to support the safe and enjoyable use of the Harbour for recreational activity, which will be managed in accordance with the Navigational Safety Management Plan, Poole Harbour Byelaws and the Poole Harbour Aquatic Management Plan". The Harbour Commissioners are responsible for maintaining the Harbour for safe navigation for commercial and recreational users and work with other marine agencies to police the Harbour to ensure speed limits and other local byelaws are adhered to.

Poole Harbour Control is located at the Harbour Office and is manned by a Harbour Control Officer on a 24-hour basis. Harbour Control controls the traffic entering and leaving and monitors all marine activity within the Harbour and its approaches. The office is the communications centre for the Harbour and the first point of contact in cases of most incidents except Emergencies as defined by this paper where Harbour Control takes a supporting role to HM Coastguard. Harbour Control also disseminates information on shipping movements as well as arranging pilots and tugs.

Extract from the DfT's Guide to Good Practice on Port Marine Operations

Section 5.6 - SEARCH AND RESCUE

5.6.1. The MCA have a national plan to manage major seaborne incidents. This is an integrated response relying upon voluntary bodies such as the RNLI and local resources. Arrangements have been made with various fire services and the RAF to provide helicopter support. [PHC note: In reality the local SAR helicopter is managed and tasked by the Coastguard].

5.6.2. It is the responsibility of HM Coastguard to co-ordinate the search and rescue phase of any distress within harbour limits. Harbour authorities provide support in various ways, for example the use of pilot boats in emergencies. HM Coastguard will assist a harbour authority and provide co-ordination in the search and rescue phase of any incident which is being carried out under the Port Emergency Plan. The harbour authority will remain responsible for managing the overall response to a port emergency. Some authorities have a memorandum of understanding with HM Coastguard on lines of responsibility and communication in the event of a port incident.

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5.6.3 HM Coastguard is responsible on behalf of the Department for Transport for the co-ordination of Civil Maritime Search and Rescue within the United Kingdom Search and Rescue Region.

5.6.4 When alerted or notified by a Harbour Authority or in the event of being the first recipient of an alert or notification HM Coastguard will, after consulting with the Harbour Authority, assist the Harbour Authority by co-ordinating the “Search and Rescue” phase of any Distress incident within the harbour limits.

5.6.5 A Distress incident is defined in IAMSAR (Vol. 1) as being a situation wherein there is a reasonable certainty that a vessel or other craft, including an aircraft or a person, is threatened by grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance.

Extracts from RYA Race Management Guide:

Race Committee

The Race Committee is delegated with all the powers required to conduct the racing. It is responsible for what does or does not take place on the water. It runs the races. The Race Committee is responsible for the safety of all competitors and others involved in the event;

Race Officer

The RO is responsible for the actual conduct of the racing on their course. Ideally, the RO is an on-the-water manager, who lets the team get on with their jobs whilst keeping an overview of what goes on around the entire race course. The RO will liaise closely with the Principal Race Officer. The RO and key assistants should record all their actions on recorders for later reference. The recorders should be left on during all start, recall and finishing procedures. The [RO is the] responsible person on a race course.

Safety Officer

In dinghy and board racing the Safety Officer deals with safety and rescue operations under the guidance of the RO. In practice, they both work together very closely although the RO is ultimately responsible for the safety of the event. Cooperation with local Rescue organisations is highly recommended.

Safety

Whilst the boats are entirely responsible for their own safety (RRS 1, RRS 4 and standard safety SIs) the RO has ultimate responsibility whilst on the water for the duty of care held by the Organising Authority.

Prepare a Crisis Management Plan

- Who takes control if there is a problem?

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- *When do you call out the emergency services?*
- *What arrangements do you have with the Police, Coastguard and the Local Authority?*
- *Who controls or disseminates information after an incident?*

The following issues also need to be considered:

- *a system with which to identify boats with crews removed such as marking with streamers.*
- *contingency plans for a change in conditions including the onset of fog.*
- *liaison with shore-side facilities and emergency services to cope with medical emergencies and injuries including a designated point for landing such incidents.*
- *a method understood by all safety crews to patrol effectively when boats sail out to the race area*

Emergency Guidelines

In the event of an emergency occurring (including severe injury to a sailor or event personnel or structural damage endangering the safety of a boat in the event), the first boat on the scene at a dinghy event, should inform all stations using a predetermined code (such as 'Code Red') and the location of the incident. The code itself is to be defined in the safety plan and emphasized at the briefings. An immediate assessment of the situation by the race officer is made and if appropriate the incident plan then becomes active. If the situation is considered to be hazardous to the rest of the fleet the race officer may elect to stop racing by either shortening course or executing an abandonment as appropriate. An emergency is only declared closed when the situation has been resolved. The race officer will only then inform all stations that 'Code Red' is cleared.

Safety Briefing

Whilst the RO is responsible for safety it is common practice for the safety officer to lead this briefing, but always with the RO present. The implications for safety in keelboat racing are very different as there is a much greater onus on the skipper of each boat and they are much less likely to capsize. So the safety briefing is usually restricted to dinghy and board events. The content of a safety briefing should cover the following issues:

- *introductions of the RO and other key people.*
- *any local hazards.*
- *the ability of the competitors racing.*
- *the tally system in place.*
- *the system used to identify boats that have had their crews removed such as marking the dinghy or board with streamers.*
- *the location of the mother-ship if one is available.*
- *the contingency plans for a change in conditions including the onset of fog and the use of GPS.*
- *the methods for dealing with injuries and medical emergencies.*

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- *the location for landing injuries and medical emergencies.*
- *the method to be used to patrol effectively whilst sailing out to the race area, during the race and whilst returning to shore.*
- *the policy for dealing with capsizes and when to intervene.*
- *the correct method of righting a capsized boat of the type this safety team is responsible for (and those on other course areas if appropriate).*
- *the VHF channel to be used and backup channels should the main one become blocked.*
- *the correct method for using a VHF particularly when conditions are poor with strong winds.*
- *the definition of when and what to transmit on the VHF particularly if there is only one channel for the course area concerned – no chatter particularly during the start sequence.*

VHF

The radio operator must have a VHF licence and adhere to the regulations and procedures imposed by that licence. It is acceptable for such a person to delegate this role to another unlicensed individual but this must be undertaken with supervision.

Conclusion

In all of the above, the RYA, in acknowledgement of the fact that it is impossible to make one rule to cover all eventualities, have made a number of recommendations, but have left the specifics to be decided by the organisations involved.

What is clear is that the Race Officer owes a duty of care to all race participants, equally; and should an emergency affect one; the Race Officer is still responsible for the others. Equally clear is that the PHC Harbour Control must be advised of an Emergency, but should not be the Emergency Co-ordinator unless requested to do so by HM Coastguard. Likewise, the role of HM Coastguard is clear in that they have primacy over all maritime search and rescue incidents.

In an Emergency situation, the life of the casualty is paramount and the casualty must be brought to safety (ie in to the care of the shore-side emergency services) in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

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