

SLYC Guidelines for Operating Rescue Boats

General

This offers sound guidelines for rescue boat operation. These are guidelines, not rules, because every situation is different, and the rescue boat crew must apply their experience and common sense to each situation to the best of their ability.

Rescue Boat Objectives

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

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

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

Rescue Boat Crew

Each rescue boat should be crewed by at least two people, one to drive the boat and the other to perform actions as required.

The driver must be an experienced power boat operator with RYA Power Boat Level 2.

Less experienced members of the crew who have gained power boat level 2 can gain valuable practice by driving the boat in non-rescue situations under the supervision of the experienced driver.

An experienced rescue coordinator should be in charge of the rescue boats and rescue operations during large scale events or regattas.

Rescue Boat Equipment

The rescue boats must carry a Marine Band Radio and the SLYC Rescue Box that contains a First Aid Kit, Rescue Knife and Space Blanket. In addition the Rescue box for the Club Tornado (Rescue 1) contains inshore flares.

The rescue boat crew must always wear their life jackets when on the water.

Conducting a Rescue

Prioritising Rescues

When multiple capsize occur at the same time, the rescue crew must prioritise which boat to investigate first. The decision should be based on a number of factors including weather conditions, visibility, location of the incident, age and experience of the crew and the type of boat.

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.

Approaching a Capsized Sailboat

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

Approach the capsized sailboat slowly.

Approach the capsized boat from leeward, to a point ahead of the capsized boat's bow. It is easier to control the rescue boat, with no chance of being blown onto the capsized boat.

If there is no sign of the sailor and the centreboard is sticking out of the bottom of the boat, the most effective way of ensuring no-one is stuck under the boat is by righting it as quickly as possible. This involves the rescue boat coming alongside, turning off engine and two rescue boat crew putting their weight on the centreboard to right the boat as quickly as possible.

If the centreboard is not available, the bow of the boat should be lifted onto the rescue boat, which will give you available space to look under the boat for a trapped sailor.

Assessing a Sailor's Condition

Upon arrival at the capsized sailboat, the rescue crew must assess the condition of the sailor either verbally or visually.

Check that the crew needs assistance prior to helping

Remember that a sailor's judgement can become impaired when s/he is cold and tired.

Recovering a Sailor

Remember the crew will be disqualified from the race if you give aid.

The rescue boat engine should be turned off when in close proximity to the sailor.

The sailor should be recovered over the side of the rescue boat

Recovered sailors should be put ashore as soon as possible to avoid overcrowding the rescue boat.

Injuries should be treated as necessary and reported to the Rescue Captain.

Assisting a Sailboat

When to Attempt Recovery of a Sailboat

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.

Righting of boats, dropping of sails and tying to a mooring, if the situation permits, allows the rescue boat to get back on duty.

Righting a Capsized Boat

The rescue boat may be required to assist with a capsized boat or one with its mast stuck in the mud especially with younger sailors.

The sailor should be in the rescue boat at this stage and not still in the water.

Discuss the procedure with the sailboat crew and 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 to avoid bending the mast.

A rope should be tied to the mast near the gooseneck, then run over the high side of the boat and tied to the rescue 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.

Towing

Towing can put large stresses on sailboats, so tow slowly.

When dinghies are being towed, their centreboards should be raised.

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.