

A guide to the various roles involved in running a major regatta

(i.e. Optimist Nationals)

Safety Official - Onshore

Safety is obviously the number one important role and there is a lot to it. The role needs to merge with the functions of both the on water team and the results service. It cannot exist as an isolated department.

The main role of the Safety Official is to make sure that all sailors who go afloat, return ashore safely. This is normally carried out by a "sign / off" process. If this is a paper system there should be separate forms for 'sign on' and 'sign off'. It is best if the sailors come to the sign on area and an official puts a tick next to their name. Do not allow the sailors to 'tick' the form as there is no track as to who said the sailor was safe. It is however OK for the official to tick the form because we all know who the official is. If the sailors are to register them selves then they should 'sign' not tick.

As soon as it is obvious that all the boats that are going to leave the beach have left, any boats that have not signed on should be accounted for. They will either still be on the beach, gone home, or will have forgotten to sign on and will be sailing. If they are sailing the shore crew needs to radio the committee to give them the missing numbers and all boats should be asked to look out for them. They can then be signed on afloat, and spoken to about their non-signing on.

Once the time of the scheduled start has been reached the sign on sheet should be removed so that it cannot be tampered with and new sign off sheets put out ready for the boat's return.

If a sailor comes ashore early they should be signed off (preferably by an official) and a note made as to the reason they came ashore because it is important to know why the sailor came ashore. The results will not have the early bird amongst them, although they will have signed on and off. The results people could waste a lot of time looking for the missing boats in the results only to find they never did finish.

As rescue craft pick up sailors in distress they usually radio the number of the boat they are either sending or bringing ashore. The sign on official should make a note of those numbers. They are usually of little use to the committee boat so don't bother telling them unless they request them. They too should be recorded as above for the same reasons.

As the main body of the fleet comes ashore they should be reminded frequently to sign off. Any gaps must be examined with urgency. If there really is an emergency this is the critical time to go looking. In half an hour or an hour they may well have drowned. It should NEVER be 'assumed' a sailor is safe. If in any doubt get rescue boats out on the course starting to look, while you sort it out? A quick look at the beach trolleys is a very good first check. Usually there will also be a concerned parent pacing the shoreline, but it could be that both parent and child are still afloat with a broken down outboard or worse. Don't hesitate to call for help on 111.

Coastguard and Police would rather be called unnecessarily than too late. They have access to resources that you don't such as planes and helicopters. Be aware they usually work on Channel 16 and certainly not on the normal yachting regatta frequencies.

Rescue afloat

Different clubs and venues will have different plans. The important thing is to have one. There should be at least one rescue boat for every 10 sailing dinghies. More if it's rough. This could mean that you sail the two flights at separate times if you have prolonged bad weather, in order to double the rescue boat ratio. It's quite a good idea to schedule the available rescue boats into zones and for these to change each day so that no one spends all their time in an unpopular zone. Dedicated rescue boats should be identified by a flag or a brightly coloured outboard cover so that spectator boats realise that boats on the course are there for a purpose and that they should not go wondering onto the course. Official boats should set an example by getting off the course unless they are specifically required to be there. All rescue boats should have a VHF radio and everyone should listen on the same frequency with a second frequency which boats can use for lengthy boat to boat discussion.

The safety boat director should be afloat in one of the rescue boats. He should have the call signs of all the rescue boats under his control and should direct boats to rescues as necessary. As a rescue boat takes a yacht in tow, or helps them right a capsized boat and sends them ashore, they should radio the 'safety ashore' officials to alert them to a retiring boat. The Beach master should monitor these calls and keep a look out for sailors returning to the beach and get them to sign off.

If there is a major meltdown during racing, it is likely that communications will be very limited. Each boat will be on its own to do its best. It is essential to have a plan ahead of this happening to make the best use of resources. Towing swamped boats to the shore is the least efficient use of resources. Firstly try and right and bale the yacht, perhaps lower the sprit and encourage the sailor to sail the reefed boat ashore. If this is not a practical solution consider taking the yacht and tying it up behind one of the hard sided boats which will not be suitable for rescue duties. This might be the committee boat, which should not be required to start any more races in those conditions. If this is not suitable then lift the yacht across the rescue boat and take it ashore as quickly as possible.

If boats are going ashore other than at the proper launching place, someone should go there to radio sail numbers of boats that are safe. In the end there will always be a few boats unaccounted for. The more complete your records, the easier it is going to be to track down the missing ones. Be sure that everyone knows what he or she is going to have to do in these circumstances by training in advance.

It is not recommended that you take a sailor off his boat leaving it unattended but if a sailor is ill and needs to be removed try and get another rescue boat to take care of his yacht. There is nothing more scary than an empty yacht.

Rescue boats should stay afloat until all sailors have returned to the beach. Unfortunately this seldom happens because parents want to race back to the beach to prepare their child's trolley. It is important therefore that those skippers who do not have children sailing follow in the tail-enders.

Sometimes radios become jammed on in the transmit function. The only boat that is not aware of it is the boat whose radio it is. Often radio calls are impossible. If this happens please go to the boat next to you and ask them to check their radio. It is often easy to isolate who is responsible as you can frequently hear voices – maybe male or female and you can hear engine noise for a boat which is moving and frequent wave noise for a boat going to windward and less noise going with the waves.

Taking Results

Next to safety taking the results is the most important part of the regatta and the most likely to cause problems. With something like 200 boats finishing in 40 minutes it is inevitable that boats will come through in groups, frequently 4-6 at a time. Because you need to determine who beat whom it is often left until they are crossing the line to call the sail numbers at which time it may not be possible to identify all the overlapping sails. There are several remedies requiring a high number of helpers, but the importance should not be understated.

The most experienced person should be situated on the line calling the results into a Dictaphone with a scribe alongside who is writing down what he says. Often the sound on the Dictaphone is not great what with shouting, wave noise and wind noise all being recorded.

There should be another pair of spotters doing exactly the same thing at the pin end. A third person standing close to the spotter listens to the call. If the spotter misses a boat he should call "leave a space" and the third person should follow that boat until he has determined the boat's number, which can then be entered in the space.

If possible another pair of spotters and scribe should be positioned as far away as possible on the boat so as not to be influenced by the calling and assemble their own version. This will not be 100% accurate as they are not on the line but their record will help sort out any numbers that were missed or transposed. e.g 3798 becomes 3789.

Another very useful call, requiring the least amount of experience is taken from the stern of the finish boat and records the numbers of the boats as they approach the finish. This is a low stress job, as they are just catching the numbers when they can see them in roughly the right order significantly reducing the chance of missing a boat altogether.

With the modern digital camera it is very useful to record a load of still pictures especially when a bunch is approaching. Video cameras are not so good because

they suffer from 'shake' and wave movement and do not generally produce good enough quality to read the sail numbers.

Once the boats have finished all the sets of results should be combined to give a 'final' set. Gaps can be filled and perhaps some of the transpositions discovered and sorted out. Each set should be marked with the name of the person who took them so that at a later time they can be questioned about what they saw. All sets of results should be taken ashore for processing.

Processing the results

No matter how careful the team afloat, there will always be complications with the results with boats which are missing, or numbers which occur more than once in the list. Sailors do strange things without realising the trouble they cause.

Boats missing are often those who either never went afloat or did start but returned to shore early which is why it is essential to get hold of all the information available so that those sailors can be eliminated straight away.

If a boat appears more than once it is usually one of two possibilities. If the two results are close to each other the boat may have done a penalty after crossing the line and then recrossed; -you should assume the later result is correct. If they are widely spaced it is likely one of them is wrongly recorded or has borrowed a sail with the same number.

Everyone is keen to check the results as soon as they come ashore. It is good practice to put up the very preliminary results at the earliest opportunity, even just a copy of the ROs hand written results. This will often help when someone spots an error that might save you a lot of time later.

It is very important to have a 'Results enquiry' process if someone wants to query a result. Someone at the enquiry desk with a supply of appropriate forms and able to receive the form and communicate the answer when it's ready will give competitors confidence the matter is being dealt with properly. If they are not happy with your decision they have the right to request redress and the protest committee will sort it out.

The Race Officer and Results spotter should make themselves available immediately after racing. If they have a boat to put away or a child to see to, then find someone else to do that if possible. They saw it all happen and will be able to give considerable help sorting out any queries.