



## **Small Craft Emergency Protocol Background**

**Following a PYA sub group meeting this is the final draft of a Small Craft Emergency Protocol aimed at improving the initial response to recreation emergency situations within Poole Harbour, especially communications.**

### **Initial Consultees:**

Poole Harbour Commissioners  
Parkstone, Poole and Royal Motor Yacht Clubs  
Poole Yachting Association  
HM Coastguard  
RNLI  
RYA

### **Co-ordinating Small Craft Emergencies within Poole Harbour**

In recent years there have been 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.

From the outset we must define an Emergency for the purposes of this paper:

**“An incident which poses a threat to life, or has the likely potential to do so, and which requires external assistance”** – an Ambulance, for example.

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.

### **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 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**

Harbour Control is located at the Harbour Office and is manned by a Harbour Control Officer (HCO) on a 24-hour basis. The HCO 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 emergency. The HCO also disseminates information on shipping movements as well as arranging pilots and tugs.

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## **Extract from : A 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.

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.

5.6.6 The Harbour Authority will remain responsible for managing the overall response to any incident within the port limits.

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## **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 his 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?*
- *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.*
- *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.*

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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 Officer 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.

Our experience of the current arrangements is thus:

A safety boat recognises an Emergency situation; using for example VHF Ch 'M' he reports the Emergency to the Race Officer. Using his mobile phone or VHF Ch '14' the RO reports the Emergency to the HCO, who in turn, using the phone reports it to the Coastguard, who launch assets, probably communicating on Ch '0' as they have no immediate contact with the first informant. Not one of the communication phases mentioned has been monitored by any other interested party; the potential for interpretation or mis-information is immense, and the delay incurred is not in the casualty's best interests. When the SAR asset launches on service they are immediately at a disadvantage of how to contact the first informant for a situation update and for a revised position and intentions.

Equally, in all of this, the Race Officer has been distracted from his duty of care to the other participants and the HCO has been distracted from his first responsibilities of over-seeing the merchant traffic.

Having consulted with our Harbour Control Officers, one of whom has forty years of yachting and racing experience, nineteen years as a Coastguard Watch Manager and a number of years' experience in VTS operations; and having held informal discussions with the RYA and HMCG, the following protocol is recommended:

See accompanying document.