

AVON SAILING CLUB

RISK ASSESSMENT 2013

This assessment was first undertaken in 2002 and updated with the addition of fire and child protection sections in 2007. This revision has been undertaken to ensure that the assessment covers any recent changes to operations. It was last approved by the committee in January 2011.

Responsibility for Safety.

Risk is inherent in any water based activity. This risk cannot be limited to only certain areas of operation and neither can the onus for safe operation be placed upon one individual. Therefore it must fall to all club members at all times to take responsibility for their own safety and that of others, particularly when children and the inexperienced are participating in club activities. Overall the committee should review matters affecting safety as they arise and seek to minimise risk to what they consider an acceptable level. However, it must also be accepted by all who take part in club activities that risk can never be reduced to zero.

On a day-to-day basis the Officer of the Day (OD) is responsible for setting courses and safety boat operation. His standing instructions indicate that he should consider safety amongst other matters when undertaking these risks and the instructions provide guidance as to how a safe level of operation may be achieved. There are however, many variables in sailing and no rulebook can cover all eventualities. ODs are experienced sailors and must be permitted to use their judgement on day-to-day application of safety rules in light of their knowledge of the weather, state of the river, individuals experience levels, boat capabilities and the other variables that affect club operations. However notwithstanding the OD's responsibilities towards safety it is still the individual taking part in sailing activities who has the ultimate responsibility to ensure tasks are within his capabilities and for bringing to the notice of the OD hazards that may affect himself or others.

Water Borne Activity

Rescue Boats. The club has 3 rescue boats that may be considered ideal for the purpose: the 2 Rigiflexs and the Dory. All are moderately fast, manoeuvrable, stable and easy to operate. The two Rigiflexs in particular were bought with safety of operation as the primary criteria and this led to the disposal of the 'Tin Boat' as unsuitable. The most dangerous part of any rescue boat is the propeller. The matter of providing shrouds for the props has been considered but the advice of the RYA is that shrouds create many dangers as they eliminate since body parts can be trapped between shroud and prop with greater damage than if no shroud were in place. The advice then is to ensure that the engine is invariably placed in neutral as soon as the rescue boat is in close vicinity to anyone on the water and only nose first approaches should be contemplated.

Recommendation. The rescue boat outboards should not be fitted with shrouds.

Rescue Boat Drivers. Six club members have passed the RYA Rescue Boat Course. It is recommended that club member be shown how to operate a rescue boat by one of these

approved members before they are allowed to act as a rescue boat driver. This is what happens at present but the arrangement is informal. The committee may wish to consider some formal method of recording such tuition, perhaps by awarding a 'licence' to an individual when they have been approved or by maintaining a central register of approved rescue boat drivers. The second method is perhaps the most easily controlled, with a simple logbook recording those who have undertaken the training. In theory any club member eligible for the Assistant Officer of the Day (AOD) roster should have received this training but if that is so then consideration may have to be given to setting an age limit for inclusion on the AOD roster and hence for receiving rescue boat training; the recommended age limit for single handed rescue boat operation is 16 and over. It should be possible to include younger members on the AOD roster but only operating in parallel with an older member as a training exercise. The Dory and the Rigifiex are easy to operate and it is recommended that any approved driver be permitted to operate either as a rescue boat.

Recommendation: The club has an adequate level of safety boat cover. The committee should consider some method of formalising rescue boat training and recording those eligible to act as rescue boat drivers.

Deployment of the Rescue Boats. Whenever organised water borne activity takes place it is essential that a rescue boat be deployed. There are some activities that can be considered to have a higher level of risk. These include all activities undertaken by children under 16 or inexperienced sailors of any age or even racing by experienced sailors where the wind and water conditions are such that capsizes can be considered probable. For such activities a manned rescue boat with the engine running must be the minimum requirement. For other activities a rescue boat at standby can be considered sufficient. A boat at standby does not necessarily have to be under engine power but can be tied up alongside the pontoon with the operator able to respond immediately and be underway within, say, a minute. Where multiple activities are taking place, such as training of novices and racing by experienced sailors in light to moderate airs, it may be possible for one rescue boat to cover both activities as long as all boats are in view all of the time. The emphasis here though must stay on the training group, which is the higher risk activity. The OD should be allowed to use his own judgements regarding the acceptability of such arrangements taking into account the weather, experience levels and the mutual support that can be given between experienced sailors. If in any doubt two rescue boats should be deployed to cover two activities

To be considered deployed a rescue boat should be on the water with sufficient fuel and with its engine checked. A nominated competent person must be available to man the boat and must be aware that they have this responsibility. This person is normally the AOD but if the AOD is not checked out in rescue boat operation some other individual will have to be nominated by the OD. In difficult wind conditions the OD should give serious thought to having a two man crew available since this can be necessary for righting some craft after they have turned turtle or for towing craft off banks when they are tangled with trees Likewise in difficult conditions the OD should consider having the rescue boat manned and underway rather than on standby.

Cruising activities by competent sailors is not a high-risk activity. By the nature of the river the bank is never far away even a capsized boat provides good floatation. All competent sailors are able to judge safe sailing conditions and right their boat if necessary. Some cruising takes place outside the clubs normal active days when there is no one present to man a safety boat and this has long been an intrinsic part of club life. For these reasons it is felt

that individual cruising activity where each boat is skippered by competent sailors over 16 should not require rescue boat cover.

Recommendation A safety boat must cover all organised water borne activities but it should be left to the OD to decide the exact deployment needed depending on the circumstances at the time. High risk activities must be covered by a deployed boat whereas relatively low risk activities can be covered by a boat and crew at standby. Ad hoc cruising activities led by competent sailors over 16 should not require safety boat cover. This is the normal method of operation adopted by the club at present.

Safety Boat Kit. Following attendance at a safety boat course by a member it was recommended that each safety boat carry an emergency pack. This was agreed and each Rigiflex now has installed: a knife, a throw cord, medical pads and tape for securing a bleeding wound, spare kill cord.

Safety Boat Radios. The club owns 3 walkie-talkie type radios suitable for rescue boat use. These are most useful when operations of any sort are being undertaken out of sight of the OD Box. The committee needs to decide whether carriage of radios in a rescue boat should be made mandatory in any set of circumstances or whether their use can be considered optional. Since the radios are not invariably able to maintain contact and there are times when they are uncharged it is felt that a decision to make carriage of radios mandatory could jeopardise operations at times. In addition, to place reliance on what is essentially an unreliable communication system could itself jeopardise safety. In addition in many years of non radio operation there has never been a circumstance when the lack of radio communication has caused any particular danger.

Recommendation. It is therefore recommended that the use of radio communications should be encouraged for distant training operations but not be made mandatory.

Lifejackets. It is recommended that any person operating any craft afloat at the ASC should be required to wear a life jacket. In addition all persons under 16 should be required to wear a lifejacket when on the pontoon or when launching boats at the foot of the slipway. These two requirements have long been accepted club policy.

Health Risk. The nature of the river is that it is untreated water and so must be considered unfit for consumption. Capsizes and other activities which result in immersion in the river must carry some health risk from accidental ingestion of river water. However newcomers, and particularly children, are regularly warned against these risks, particularly those relating to Weill's Disease, and notices are displayed on the club describing symptoms and the action to be taken if the disease is suspected. It is not felt that any further action is feasible and that the risks associated with immersion in the river water are intrinsic to the activity of the club. It is worth noting that in the long history of the club there has not been any history of serious illness that could be traced to water immersion.

Land Based Activity

The Club Hut. In the past, external authorities have inspected the club hut from time to time. As a consequence the club has adequate fire precautions and its single story nature and

number of exits makes it a low risk structure from an escape point of view. The cooking facilities are modern with an external fuel source. The club hut and its operation do not appear to present any unacceptable level of risk to members. However, external inspection by the fire department has now ceased and the club is required to make its own fire risk assessment. This has been done and is attached as Annex A to this assessment. The club's insurance company have also placed a requirement for the club to have an inspection of the electrical system. This was duly undertaken in 2007 and all remedial work required by that inspection was completed.

The Club Grounds. The club grounds do not appear to offer any unacceptable risk to people within them. Camping has taken place within the grounds for many years in accordance with a license issued by Tewkesbury Council in 1981. This was reviewed in 2010. There is no record of any major fires or similar occurrences. Car parking is well controlled and the undulating nature of the ground ensures low car speed. There is no record of "near miss" accidents within the club environs. A right of way runs through the club grounds but this does not appear to offer an area for concern being at least as safe as the rest of the right of way along the riverbank. All club owned boats are disabled when the club is not active precluding their use by non-members and the club grounds are secured against access by motor vehicles. Access to the club grounds by non-members cannot be stopped because of the right of way and the only danger to intruders is likely to stem from the use of the pontoon, which is less stable than the riverbank. However, there is no way in which access can be stopped and any small risk to trespassers has to be accepted.

Health and Safety. The operation of the kitchen is subject to catering health and safety checks by Tewkesbury Borough Council from time to time at their discretion. A paper based check was made in 2006 and did not raise any major problems. *As such kitchen operation does not appear to offer any unacceptable risk. Several members of the club have undertaken hygiene and food preparation courses. Their certificates are displayed in the kitchen.*

First Aid. In 2009 12 club members undertook a one day Red Cross course for issue or revalidation of a basic first aid certificate. The club has signs near the door giving the exact location of the club and useful telephone numbers. There is a stocked first aid box and an injuries book.

Smoking. The current standard is that smoking is banned anywhere inside the club, including the under floor bays, on the balcony or the OD box. Smoking is otherwise permitted in the club grounds including the grass area between club and river. This would seem to meet all legal requirements to be reasonable. The club has very few smokers.

Dogs. The club policy is that dogs are permitted in the club grounds as long as they are under control at all times. Dogs are not permitted inside the club hut and particularly not in the kitchen area. Owners are responsible for the removal and cleaning of a dog's excreta. This policy appears reasonable.

Child Protection Policy. It has been deemed proper to generate a child protection policy. Many of the physical aspects of child protection are covered within this document. There are, however, areas outside of physical protection which also need to be considered. This has been done within the draft Child Protection Policy which is at Annex B.

Conclusion. The club buildings and grounds have operated safely for many years and there is no obvious area of risk sufficient to generate concern

Summary

The intention of this risk assessment has been to see whether there are any areas of club operation where the risk can be reduced. In general the club does appear to be aware of areas of risk and does what it can to minimise them. The club has a good accident record over many years and the author of this report has not been able to discern any particular areas of concern. However, the Committee may like to consider formalising the matter of rescue boat driver training and authorisation.

Notwithstanding the above, it behoves all members of the club to be aware of the need to maintain a high level of safety awareness and to draw the attention of the committee to any areas where there may be safety deficiencies.

Barry Simon
Jan 2013

Annex:

- A. Fire Risk Assessment.
- B. Child Protection Policy