

SAFETY
ON THE
WATER

dinghy sailing

SEA SAFETY GUIDELINES

Marine Safety Working Group

Aim

To use its collective expertise and experience to create and communicate marine safety information and messages to endeavour to reduce accidents and to prevent the loss of life on Irish waters.

Objectives

- To establish strong working relationships with other national and local organisations to create/promote accident prevention programmes.
- To establish cause and trends in accidents at sea and inland waters.
- To develop accident prevention programmes.
- To provide a co-ordinated approach to the dissemination of safety information in response to individual enquiries.
- To measure effectiveness of prevention programmes.

www.safetyonthewater.ie

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Preparation is the key to safe sailing. The right boat, knowledge of weather conditions, boating skills, appropriate clothing and safety equipment are essential.

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Once at sea, it's vital that your passengers and crew are organised, know what they are doing, understand the 'rules of the road' and what to do if things go wrong.

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Knowledge can be the difference between life and death. So familiarise yourself with recovery procedures, distress signals, first aid and rescue techniques.

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We probably can't answer all your questions in this booklet. So we've included a list of people who may be able to help.

Yacht and Boat Safety Scheme

For added protection at sea, join the safety identification scheme. It's a free service and you'll find an application form at the back of this guide.

before you go



Get the right boat for the job

Be realistic about the type of sailing dinghy you can handle. Faster does not necessarily mean better – you will learn more and have just as much fun by starting out with a dinghy that is easy to handle and forgiving if you make mistakes. Remember that any dinghy can capsize, sometimes when you least expect it. If you're not able to handle the boat this could turn into a dangerous situation.

- There is a wide choice of dinghies both new and secondhand. If you are unsure about which type you should be choosing, it is probably best to limit your choice to popular and well known brands. Make a short list and seek advice from people who have owned and sailed those dinghies before or contact the ISA on [01 2800239](tel:012800239).
- A dinghy must never be overloaded – too much weight will affect its stability. Check that the crew capacity is within your requirements. Modern dinghies should have a plaque indicating their maximum capacity.
- Check specification carefully and make sure everything necessary is included. Extras such as a trailer or boat cover can cost a great deal.
- Check safety features. Most important is the buoyancy which keeps the dinghy afloat during a capsize. This may be provided by sealed chambers which must be absolutely watertight, or by inflatable bags beneath the foredeck and side decks on older boats.
- Insure the boat for accidents, damage and third party cover. Premiums for sailing dinghies are generally low. Proof of insurance is normally mandatory if you want to go racing.

Get free safety advice from the RNLI

The RNLI provides sea safety advice in a friendly and confidential manner and can arrange to send a trained adviser to discuss your boat's safety equipment totally free of charge. The service is called SEA Check (Safety Equipment Advisory Check) and has provided practical advice to thousands of boat owners.

Practical demonstrations including man overboard, sea survival and flares are available from SEA Check.

- For more information, or to arrange a visit, call [freephone 0800 789589](tel:0800789589) or register on line at www.rnli.org.uk/seacheck.asp



Join a club

Ireland has a large network of sailing clubs, both around the coast and on rivers, lakes and reservoirs. Joining a sailing club has many advantages.

- It provides a safe place to store your boat and equipment, with a purpose-built area for launching and landing.
- Many clubs will provide safety boat back-up, particularly during racing.
- A club introduces you to people with the same interest and encourages sailing in company, which is safer than sailing alone.
- Clubs provide teaching courses and volunteer services for their members.
- Many clubs promote sailing for children with maximum emphasis on safety. Clubs also provide a good network for buying and selling secondhand equipment, such as buoyancy aids which need to be changed when children move up a size!
- For details of clubs in your area, contact the ISA on **01 2800239**.



Master basic skills

Before setting out, you and your crew must possess sufficient skill to sail safely. This means acquiring basic knowledge of how to assess wind and weather, handling the boat, launching and landing, understanding tides, rules of the road, use of safety equipment and maintenance of the dinghy, rigging and sails.

It is recommended that anyone going on or near the water should learn to swim, develop water confidence, rescue and lifesaving skills. For more information, contact Irish Water Safety on **1890 420202**.

Take a course

The ISA administers a comprehensive training programme for dinghy sailors. The Small Boat Sailing Scheme range from 'Taste of Sailing' to 'Advanced Level' courses for adults and those aged under 16. These courses are run by sailing schools and clubs. For information, call ISA on **01 2800239**.

Dressed for action

The crew of a dinghy must stay dry and warm, whatever the weather. All crew members should have access to suitable clothing that is fully functional and will protect against hypothermia.

- The effects of wind chill and cold water mean there are few days when you can sail in Ireland without protective clothing. It is never as warm on the water as on the land and it may rapidly become much colder.

- Protective clothing should always be taken on the boat as a precaution, even when you set out on the hottest day of the year.

- A neoprene wetsuit protects against cold water and wind. To be effective, it must be a virtually perfect fit and have zips and seams that are as near waterproof as possible to stop cold water flushing through. The wetsuit can be worn with a loose fitting, windproof dry top to aid heat retention in colder weather.

- An alternative to a wetsuit is to wear waterproof trousers and jacket which are purpose-designed for dinghy sailing and will provide a barrier against spray, rain and wind. They should be worn over fleece mid and base layers. The disadvantage is that you risk getting wet through if you capsize, with the extra weight of sodden clothing impeding your ability for self-help.



- A second alternative is to wear a drysuit made from waterproof material with latex neck, wrists and ankles to keep all the water out. Drysuits are highly effective but are expensive and may be uncomfortable in warmer weather. Breathable fabrics which transmit sweat to the outside are likely to provide the best performance. Bright colours and retro-reflective strips are good safety features.

- Sailing boots are strongly recommended. They will provide grip when moving around a dinghy, protect your feet and ankles from injury while launching and sailing and help to keep your feet warm.

- Sailing gloves are necessary to protect against rope burn and other possible injuries and are very useful when setting off flares.

- Thermal headgear can play a major role in helping to conserve body heat.

Personal floatation devices

It is vital to always wear a suitable personal floatation device when dinghy sailing. It must be a good fit, have secure fastenings and provide the correct buoyancy to support your weight. Remember to fasten crotch straps if supplied. All lifejackets and buoyancy aids should be labelled with the European standard CE mark.

- Buoyancy is measured in newtons – 10 newtons equal 1kg of flotation.
- Buoyancy aids with 50 newtons are only for use by swimmers in sheltered waters when help is close to hand. Unlike lifejackets, they are not guaranteed to turn a person from a face-down position in the water. Their advantage is that they provide a much closer fit which is likely to be less restrictive when dinghy sailing. Buoyancy aids should be clearly labelled with the weight range they are designed to support.



- Personal floatation devices with 100 newtons are designed for those who may have to wait for rescue but are likely to be in sheltered and calm water. They are available with a choice of foam-only buoyancy, air-only buoyancy or air-foam buoyancy. The disadvantage of a lifejacket is that it may be too bulky when sailing a small dinghy or ducking beneath a low boom.



Checklist for safety

- Treat any slippery areas on the floor of the boat with non-slip paint or stick-on strips.
- Check the rigging for signs of failure. If there is rust, broken strands or corrosion at the mast, you should seek expert advice.
- Check where the rigging is fixed to the deck. Tape over exposed pins and rings to keep them in place and prevent them snagging clothing or exposed skin.
- Check all fittings including blocks, cleats, rudder and centreboard to ensure they are secure and work effectively.
- Check ropes and control lines for signs of wear and abrasion. If in doubt, replace immediately.
- Check the toe straps to make sure they won't break when you lean over the side!
- Make sure the rudder will stay locked onto the pintles if the boat inverts during a capsize.
- Check boat for signs of wear and tear or damage before heading out.



Keeping out the water

- Check the buoyancy and make sure it is sound and will not leak. You can do this by tipping the boat onto its side and performing a trial capsize in waist high water.
- A trial capsize will also show how the boat floats and how much water is left inside once it has been righted. Most modern dinghies have self-draining systems which remove most of the water. Older dinghies may be completely waterlogged. If the dinghy is not self-draining you must carry a suitable scoop-style bailer and sponge. On a family size dinghy you should also consider a bucket and manual bilge pump. Remember that bailers and buckets must be secure to the boat.
- Before launching and immediately after landing, ensure all water is drained from the boat.

Don't sail without safety equipment!

What you take will depend on the size and type of dinghy and where you are sailing.

On most dinghies you will need:

- A paddle, so you are not stuck if the wind disappears. A family size dinghy may require two paddles or oars and rowlocks.
- A towline, so you can pick up a lift from a motorboat or tie up to a post or mooring.
- Spare spray top and trousers, for emergency use on a family size dinghy.
- Emergency tool kit, including a roll of adhesive tape, spare line, shackle spanner, folding knife, pliers or equivalent multi-tool.
- Spare bungee cord for trapeze boat.



You may also need:

- An anchor, so you can stop the boat in shallow, sheltered water.
- Two or more hand-held orange smoke flares, to indicate an emergency. You can also carry hand-held red flares or mini flares. All flares must be in-date and stored in a waterproof container.
- A dayglo flag to attract attention in good visibility.
- A whistle or canister fog horn to attract attention in poor visibility.
- All equipment must be secured to the boat.



Phones/VHF

If you carry a mobile phone (preferably in a waterproof case), be aware that this is often an unreliable means of communication on the water. A handheld VHF set may be more reliable and should be considered.

- In an emergency dial 112 or 999 and ask for the Coast Guard. The service is free – the Coast Guard is always there to help.



Planning a trip

Under international regulations, you must have a plan before going afloat. You need to consider the weather, tides, limitations of your dinghy and crew and any hazards on your trip. Always have a contingency plan and make sure someone ashore knows your plans.

Being the skipper of a dinghy means taking responsibility for your actions. The safety of the crew is in your hands every time you go sailing. You must match your knowledge to the conditions and never put either crew or dinghy at risk. If you stick to that policy, you will sail safely and have a great time!

Wind direction

- A cross-shore wind is generally safest and most favourable, allowing you to sail out on one tack and sail back in on the other, with relatively flat water.
- An onshore wind may make launching and landing difficult and even dangerous. The waves will increase in size and break as the water becomes shallow close to the shore. The size and impact of the waves will depend on the steepness of the beach – the steeper the beach, the bigger the waves are likely to be.
- Never stand between the boat and the shore if the boat is being pushed back by waves in an onshore wind. Beware of the boat being turned side-on to the waves and rolled onto its side when sailing back in.
- An offshore wind is potentially most dangerous for less experienced sailors. Everything seems so calm and quiet by the beach, but as you get further from the shore the wind will increase progressively. The wind is also likely to be gusty as it funnels round trees, buildings and other obstructions on the shore. This can make beating back against the wind very difficult. If you capsize and have difficulty righting the dinghy, it will be blown further offshore into even stronger winds.



The Beaufort Scale

Wind speed is measured in nautical miles per hour or ‘knots’ (1 nautical mile equals 1,853.27m or 1.15 statute miles). Knots are divided into wind forces, using a system invented by Admiral Beaufort in the 1700’s to describe likely conditions on the open ocean and are still used for the daily shipping forecasts. The description of the sea state will generally be less severe for dinghy sailing in protected inshore waters, although coastal tides may create a sea state that is considerably more dangerous.

Beaufort	Description	Velocity in knots
0	Calm	Less than 1
Smoke rises vertically. Sea like a mirror. You will need a paddle to get home.		
1	Light air	1-3 (1-3 mph)
Direction of wind shown by smoke drift, but not by wind vanes. Ripples like fish scales form on the sea. Just enough wind to fill the sails and get the boat moving.		
2	Light breeze	4-6 (4-7 mph)
Wind felt on face. Leaves rustle. Ordinary vane moved by wind. Small wavelets, still short but more pronounced. The start of pleasant sailing conditions. Excellent for novices.		
3	Gentle breeze	7-10 (8-12 mph)
Leaves and small twigs in constant motion. Wind extends light flags. Large wavelets. Crests beginning to break. Crew should be able to sit up on the windward side.		
4	Moderate breeze	11-16 (13-18 mph)
Raises dust and loose paper. Small branches are moved. Small waves become longer. Fairly frequent white horses. The crew will need to sit right out to keep the boat upright. Capsizes possible. Novices should start heading back to the shore.		
5	Fresh breeze	17-21 (19-24 mph)
Small trees in leaf begin to sway. Crest wavelets form on inland waters. Moderate waves taking more pronounced long form. Many white horses. Chance of spray. Both crew need to work hard to keep the boat upright and it will go like a rocket offwind. Gybing requires strong nerves and skill to avoid capsizes. Only those who feel completely confident should be out sailing.		
6	Strong breeze	22-27 (25-31 mph)
Large branches in motion. Umbrellas used with difficulty! Large waves begin to form. White foam crests are more extensive. Probably some spray. The very top levels of dinghy sailing ability become necessary as the wind approaches 25 knots. Many will be unable to handle the conditions and should stay on shore. Safety cover is vital.		
7	Near gale	28-33 (32-38 mph)
Whole trees in motion. Sea heaps up and white foam from breaking waves begins to be blown in streaks along the direction of the wind. Absolute survival conditions for top level dinghy sailors. Head straight for shore with rescue boat escort!		
8 and above	Gales, storms and hurricanes	41 (47mph) and above
Winds of Force 8 and beyond are highly dangerous to dinghy sailors. You should not venture out in these conditions.		

Weather check

Always check the weather forecast before you go sailing and be prepared to cancel your plans. In addition to the regular TV forecasts, more specific marine forecasts are available through:



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- Weatherdial – 1550 123 855
- Weatherfax – 1570 131 838
- Teletext
- Irish Coast Guard Weather Forecasts – after an initial announcement on VHF Channel 16, these are broadcast on each Coast Guard Radio Station’s normal working channel.
- National and local radio and TV.

Tide check

Always assess how the tide will affect your sailing. Plan around the times of high and low water and check whether it will be a neap or spring tide.

- Beware of harbour entrances where tidal currents can flow at up to 8 knots. You may not be able to sail against the tide and may even lose control of your boat. Keep well away from all ferries.
- Beware of being left stranded by running aground while the tide is going out, or returning to the shore to find waves crashing onto a steeply shelving beach at high water.
- Beware of the tide turning so it flows against the wind, creating ‘wind against tide’ conditions with difficult waves.
- Beware of shallow channels which may become very narrow and increase the risk of grounding at low water.



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The best place to launch and land



- It is always safest to launch from an established sailing club. Before you launch, seek advice from local sailors or the Coast Guard.
- Choose a launch spot which is clear of boats, rocks, swimmers and other obstructions. Remember, you may have poor control due to the centreboard and rudder being lifted in shallow water.
- Show courtesy to other people in the vicinity. Be aware that they may not understand the difficulties of launching or landing a boat.
- Keep clear of surf. The windward end of a beach will generally have least surf.
- Avoid steeply shelving launch areas, where you will soon be out of your depth when holding the boat in the water.



Danger!

Before you step a mast or wheel a dinghy along the ground, check for overhead power lines. Although a rare occurrence, fatal accidents have occurred through this oversight.

Don't forget!

- Ensure that all bungs and hatch covers are properly closed or you may sink the boat.
- Ensure that the rudder retaining clip clicks shut or the rudder may drop off (and go to the bottom) during a capsizing.

If in doubt...

- Never keep sailing regardless.
- Be realistic about the wind, waves and your ability.
- Be prepared to make for shelter in good time, before conditions deteriorate beyond your capability



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Yacht and Boat Safety Scheme

The Yacht and Boat Safety Scheme, administered by the Irish Coast Guard, provides vital information in an emergency.

See the back page for more information and the registration form.



Practical tip from the Marine Safety Working Group

If in doubt.....don't go out! If you have any doubt about your ability to sail in the prevailing conditions or fear that the wind may get stronger, stay onshore and be prepared to leave it for another day.

under sail



Rules of the road

The primary role of these rules is to prevent collisions. They rely on common sense and good practice to succeed. This is only a brief summary drawn from the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea. For information on Racing Rules for sailing dinghies and yachts, call the ISA on 01 2800239.



- Port tack gives way to starboard tack.
- Windward boat keeps clear of leeward boat.
- An overtaking boat must always keep clear.

General rules

- It is the responsibility of the crew to maintain a good look-out at all times.
- There is a risk of collision if the bearing of an approaching vessel remains constant.
- A yacht or boat under power gives way to a yacht or boat under sail. This rule needs to be treated with caution! Firstly, there are clearly defined exceptions (see below) where powered craft have right of way since they need to use deep water. Secondly, a ‘rogue skipper’ of a powered craft may ignore or be unaware of the fact that he should give way to sail.
- Vessels of less than 20m should not impede vessels using a traffic separation scheme or confined to a narrow channel. This applies to all sailing dinghies.
- Boats under sail must give way to vessels fishing, vessels not under command (unable to manoeuvre) or vessels constrained by their draught.



Port or starboard?

- Port tack (red) is when the wind blows onto the port (left) side of the boat and sails. Port tack gives way to starboard tack.
- Starboard tack (green) is when the wind blows onto the starboard (right) side of the boat and sails. Starboard tack has right of way over port tack.

Organising the crew



- Ensure the crew is sufficiently experienced for any sailing trip, particularly if it involves children. Be aware of their limitations and try not to expect too much from them.
- Beware of dehydration when sailing in warm sun. Take sufficient fresh water or soft drinks for all the crew and make sure they drink it. Take snacks such as fruit bars to boost energy and morale if the crew start to get cold and tired.
- Ensure that you carry suncream to protect against sunburn.
- The effects of wind chill mean the crew will get progressively colder. Everyone must be equipped with suitable clothing for the prevailing and forecast conditions.
- Ensure that everyone wears a buoyancy aid at all times when afloat. Buoyancy aids must fit snugly with fastenings correctly secured. Children must wear the correct size – an oversize adult buoyancy aid which will float up over their head in the water will not do! Wearing a buoyancy aid should be as natural as wearing a seatbelt in your car.
- Give the crew specific duties when rigging, launching and sailing. Try to get everyone involved which will help prevent them getting bored, feeling cold, or even becoming frightened, in which case it's time to head back for the shore.
- Brief the crew and keep them fully informed of what you are doing and what you expect them to do. This should include launching and landing, manoeuvres while sailing and what to do if the boat capsizes.
- Getting banged on the head by the boom is always unpleasant and sometimes dangerous. It is vital that the crew knows when to duck, particularly during a gybe when the boom can swing across at high speed. The crew must also keep well clear of the kicking strap as the boom changes sides.

Sailing in safety

- Don't sail alone until you are suitably experienced. It's best to never sail alone in a solitary area.
- When possible, sail in company with other dinghies or in an area patrolled by a rescue boat. One big advantage of taking up organised club racing is that there should always be safety cover at hand.
- Check the wind, sea state, tides and weather forecast. Consult other sailors and be prepared to postpone or abandon your plans if you are unsure of your ability to cope with wind or waves.
- Be aware of the limitations of your boat. Do not over estimate its ability to deal with difficult conditions.
- Leave details of a planned sailing trip with a reliable person on shore. This should include your itinerary, expected times of departure and return, plus description of the dinghy and contact names for all people on board.
- Never sail in poor visibility or risk being caught on the water at nightfall. Allow plenty of time to get back to shore in case the wind drops in the late afternoon.
- Make sure you have alternative means of propulsion such as paddles or oars.
- Don't sail off over the horizon. Keep as close to the shore as is reasonable.
- Keep clear of fast flowing tides. Never put yourself in the situation where a strong tide turns against you. Beware of 'wind against tide' which can cause very rough water. Don't wait until you are cold and tired before you head for home.



Reefing the sails

Some dinghies can be reefed, either by rolling the mainsail round the mast or pulling the mainsail down onto the boom. Reefing is usually only effective when done on the shore and may be impossible on the water. So be cautious and reef before you go sailing – it's easy to come back and take the reefs out if the wind is less than you expected.

Dinghy capsizes

Capsizing is all part of the fun of dinghy sailing. It should be absolutely safe if you wear the correct technical clothing, sail a modern self-draining dinghy and abide by the capsize rules.

Capsize rules

- Stay with the boat. Modern dinghies float high and can be blown downwind faster than you can swim. Catch a rope as the boat goes over.
- If you find yourself under the sails or tangled in sheets, don't panic. Your buoyancy aid should keep your head clear of the water.
- Beware of highly buoyant dinghies that float very high. It may be difficult to get on to the centreboard once you are in the water.
- Try to prevent the boat turning-turtle. It may bury the mast tip in the bottom which makes righting difficult and can break the mast.
- If the boat does turn turtle and you are underneath, don't panic. There will be plenty of air in the cockpit. When you are ready take a deep breath, duck down and escape via the transom or side.
- Avoid repeated capsizes. Each attempt to right the boat becomes more physically draining and, in an offshore wind, you will be blown further and further out to sea. Don't hesitate to accept outside assistance.
- If you can't right the boat, grab hold of something and stay with the boat until rescue comes. Never leave the boat and attempt to swim for shore – an upturned boat will float and is much easier to spot than a sailor lost in the sea.



Shiver me timbers!

Beware of hypothermia following a capsize. If you are wearing an efficient wetsuit or drysuit, you should be able to continue sailing. If you or your crew have any doubts or start to feel cold, head for the shore immediately. A leaflet on hypothermia is available from Irish Water Safety on [1890 420202](tel:1890420202) or www.iws.ie.



Capsize recovery

Practice capsize recovery near the shore so that you know what to expect. Different dinghies have different characteristics which may also be changed by the wind and waves.

- As the boat goes over, make sure you grab something and don't get parted from the boat. The mainsheet or toe straps may be ideal.
- The skipper should swim round to the underside of the boat, holding the end of the mainsheet for security. He/she can then grab the end of the centreboard to ensure the boat will not turn turtle.
- The crew must ensure that all sheets are released from jammers. He/she may need to throw one end of the jib sheet over to the helmsman to help them climb up onto the centreboard.
- It is normally easiest to right the boat when the bows are almost pointing into the wind. This prevents the boat from capsizing in the other direction when it is righted. The crew may need to grab the forestay and swim the bows into the wind.
- To right the boat, the helmsman should stand on the centreboard and lean back, holding the gunwhale or jib sheet. The crew should float inside the cockpit so they are scooped in as the boat comes upright, using their weight to prevent the boat rolling over in the other direction.
- Once the boat is upright the crew should help the helmsman on board. It depends on the type of boat whether it is easiest and most stable to get in over the side or transom.
- The crew should check the boat and ensure everything is in order before continuing to sail.



Practical tip from the
Marine Safety Working Group

If you can't right the boat, or it keeps capsizing, one solution may be to pull down or roll up the sails, using the sheets as a lashing to prevent them blowing uncontrollably in the wind. With the sails down, you should be able to right the boat. You will then need to summon help.



emergency

Man overboard

If a person falls overboard, the following are guidelines for keeping them in sight and retrieving them with minimum delay – remember that cold water can rapidly kill.

- Heave to.
- Watch the person in the water and point continuously.
- Alert the emergency services if possible and let them know what has happened.
- Start your recovery manoeuvre.

which photo from windsurfing?

Never let go!

It is easy to get separated from a dinghy if you fall out while sailing or don't hold on during a capsize. This is extremely dangerous – in certain conditions, it may prove impossible to regain contact.

- Check that the toe straps are secure every time you rig the boat and ensure your feet are properly tucked under them before you start to lean out over the side!
- If the boat carries trapeze lines, ensure that all shock cords and lines are free from wear and that you are securely clipped on before leaning out.
- If the boat capsizes or you fall over the side, you must grab hold of something. The end of a sheet or control line is ideal. Don't let go until you have a firm hold on the boat. If there is any doubt, use a line to tie a hitch round your body.

Left behind

Try to swim for the dinghy but remember you will be slowed by buoyancy aid, boots and clothing and the energy required will cause rapid heat loss and exhaustion.

- Most modern dinghies are highly buoyant and can be blown downwind at several knots while they are capsized. If you fail to catch the boat, remain as calm as possible.
- In rough conditions, turn your back to the waves to keep airways clear of spray. Remember that a buoyancy aid will not be as effective as a lifejacket in keeping your head clear of the water.
- The greatest threat to your survival is the cold. Keep your legs close together to restrict movement and prevent cold water flushing through your clothing. Tighten up wrist, ankle and neck fastenings if you are wearing loose waterproofs.
- If there is someone still on board the dinghy, they will hopefully have the skill to sail back and collect you from the water. If necessary, you will have to shout or signal to show them your position.

Recovering the crew

If one of your crew is on board and the boat is still upright, a man overboard recovery may be possible.

- Turn the boat to a beam reach position, with the sails flapping to bring it to a halt. Hold it in that position to allow the man overboard to swim back to the boat.
- If this proves impossible, you will have to tack round and sail back. During this manoeuvre it is vital to keep the man overboard in sight.
- Get the boat sailing on a controlled beam reach, tack round and sail back on a course which is slightly downwind of the man overboard. This will allow you to luff onto a slow close reach for the final approach, controlling your speed by sheeting in and out the sails.
- Position the boat so it will come to a halt with the man overboard by the windward shroud. From this position, you should be able to lean forward and grab the shoulder of their buoyancy aid with your forward hand.
- With the sails blowing to leeward and stabilising the boat, you can then help them clamber over the windward side.
- The man overboard may be suffering from hypothermia or shock. If you are in any doubt, head straight for the shore or call for help.



Calling for help

Don't delay if you require outside assistance.

If other boats are near at hand...

- Wave a dayglo flag, blow a whistle or sound a canister horn to attract attention.
- Stretch out your arms to either side and raise and lower them steadily up and down.

This is an official distress signal.

If you are alone...

- Fire a hand-held, orange smoke flare, keeping it well clear of your face and the sails. Hold it as high as possible and point it to leeward so that smoke is blown away from you. Use hand-held red flares or mini flares if you have them.
- As a back-up, use a mobile phone to dial 112 or 999 and ask for the Coast Guard.



First aid



A comprehensive first aid kit and basic first aid knowledge could prove invaluable in a crisis.

- ISA and Irish Water Safety can provide details of first aid courses which are specifically marine-oriented.
- The RNLI produces a video 'First Aid Afloat' call us on [1800 789589](tel:1800789589) for more information.



Dehydration

It is easy to ignore the effects of 'drying out' while sailing, until symptoms that include a parched mouth and a muzzy, tired, headachy feeling become apparent. The cure is to drink plenty of liquid, preferably before this happens. Plain tap water is as good as anything and, on most dinghies, you can store it quite easily in plastic bottles.



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Hypothermia

Hypothermia is the greatest potential danger for dinghy sailors in Irish waters.

First Stage: Shivering, looking cold, complaining of cold. Head for shore without delay!

Second Stage: Lethargy, drowsiness or confusion followed by numbness, cramp, nausea, slurred speech and eventual loss of consciousness.

Action:

- If a person complains of the cold or shows any symptoms of moving towards the second stage of hypothermia, get them ashore as soon as possible.
- Get them out of the wind and warm them up with dry clothing/coverings and warm drinks, but never alcohol.
- If their condition deteriorates or fails to improve, seek urgent medical attention.

Sunburn

The summer sun needs to be treated with great caution. The combination of cooling wind and strong sun reflected off the salty sea may cause severe sunburn. The solution is simple – always use waterproof barrier cream on exposed body parts when dinghy sailing in the sun.



Basic lifesaving

Suspected drowning is extremely rare among dinghy sailors. However, if someone appears to have stopped breathing due to being in the water, speed is crucial in maintaining oxygen to the brain.

Check for breathing by placing your cheek beside the casualty's mouth and looking at their chest. If there is no sign, begin immediate basic lifesaving. This technique should be learnt through a first aid course. IWS provides training in basic lifesaving.

Concussion

Beware of bangs on the head when sailing. These can be avoided if the helmsman always informs the crew prior to tacks and gybes, making sure everyone watches the boom as it crosses the boat. If you suspect concussion, seek immediate medical advice.

Drink and drugs!

- Be sensible about drinking alcohol – it may impair your judgement when dinghy sailing. It will also act as a diuretic which, at the very least, is a nuisance!
- Beware of the side effects of any medication which may impair judgement and reduce physical ability.



Practical tip from the Marine Safety Working Group

Dinghy sailing is all about enjoying yourself and having a great time. Don't spoil it by biting off more than you can chew. Learn to sail sensibly and you will hopefully never need the services of a lifeboat crew!

Accepting a tow

- A sailing dinghy which is being towed should have sails lowered and centreboard retracted. The crew should sit on either side towards the back of the boat, keeping the bows up with the helmsman steering to maintain a straight course.
- The towline should be secured round the mast at deck level and, when possible led through a bow fairlead. Avoid using knots or loops which cannot be released under load.
- Beware of towing at speed. If the dinghy starts to sheer from side to side, the tow boat must immediately slow down.
- If an official safety boat or lifeboat approaches, the skipper or coxswain will inform you of their intentions. Advise them of any hazards. Follow their instructions – they are the experts. This may mean having to abandon your dinghy which should, of course be insured!

Helicopter rescue

In extreme situations, a dinghy crew may be rescued by helicopter. Use a smoke flare or hand-held red flares as a signal to the helicopter if requested.



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Remember!

The emergency services are here to help, but would rather do so before you get into trouble! **Free** safety advice is always available – **freefone 1800 789589** and talk to an expert.

Useful contacts

– as referred to throughout the booklet



General

Lifeboats

Royal National Lifeboat Institution
15 Windsor Terrace, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

Telephone: (01) 2845050 email: lifeboatsireland@rnli.org.uk
www.rnli.org.uk



Irish Water Safety
The Long Walk, Galway

Telephone: 1890 420202 (LoCall) email: info@iws.ie www.iws.ie



Irish Coast Guard
Leeson Lane, Dublin 2

Telephone: (01) 6782324 email: admin@irishcoastguard.ie
www.marine.gov.ie

In an emergency, call 999 or 112 and ask for the Coast Guard.

Training courses



Irish Sailing Association
3 Park Road, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

Telephone: (01) 2800239 email: info@sailing.ie www.sailing.ie

EPIRB registration

Maritime Radio Affairs Unit (MRAU)
Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources,
29/31 Adelaide Road, Dublin 2

Telephone: (01) 6782367 www.marine.gov.ie

Radio licensing

Commission for Communication Regulation (COMREG)
Abbey Court, Irish Life Centre, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1

Telephone: (01) 8049600

Marine Safety Working Group

The aim of the Marine Safety Working Group is to promote water safety. The group is made up of a number of organisations representing statutory bodies, search & rescue organisations and water users.

Who we are:

Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources

Leeson Lane, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 6782000
www.marine.gov.ie



Irish Coast Guard

Leeson Lane, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 6785444

In an emergency call 999 or 112 and ask for the Coast Guard.



Irish Water Safety

The Long Walk, Galway
Tel: 1890 420202 (LoCall)
www.iws.ie



Irish Sailing Association

3 Park Road,
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
Tel: (01) 2800239
www.sailing.ie



Royal National Lifeboat Institution

15 Windsor Terrace,
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
Tel: (01) 2845050
www.lifeboats.org.uk



Bord Iascaigh Mhara

PO Box 12, Crofton Road,
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
Tel: (01) 2845144
www.bim.ie



Health & Safety Authority

10 Hogan Place, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 6147000
www.hsa.ie



Waterways Ireland

20 Darling Street, Enniskillen,
BT74 7EW, Northern Ireland
Tel: 048-66323004 (from R.O.I.)
028-66323004 (from N.I.)

What we do:

The government department responsible for safety of life at sea & prevention of pollution from ships.

Responsible for co-ordination & implementation of marine search and rescue operations, pollution control & marine radio communications in Irish waters.

Irish Water Safety is the statutory body established to promote water safety in Ireland. We offer courses nationwide that develop skills in swimming, survival and rescue. We recommend that all members of the public learn to swim.

We are the governing body representing sailing, windsurfing, powerboating and personal watercraft in Ireland. We offer a range of training courses for all types of recreational boaters through our network of affiliated clubs and 'recognised teaching establishments'.

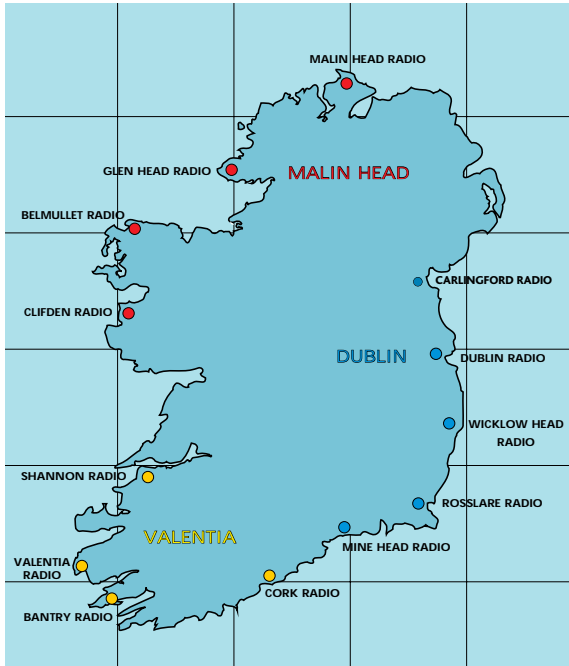
We exist to save lives at sea. This is achieved by providing a fleet of lifeboats, with 24-hour cover and crewed by well-trained volunteers. In addition, we work with other national organisations to promote sea safety. We rely on voluntary donations.

We are the principal development agency for the Irish seafood industry and promote safe working practices for the industry which involves fisheries training for both new entrants and practitioners, developing codes of practice, production of training materials and trials of preventative measures against risk on board fishing vessels.

The Health and Safety Authority promotes and enforces good standards in workplace safety. Working with employer and worker representatives, it seeks to ensure that those in control of workplaces adopt safe working practices, as required by law.

Waterways Ireland is a North/South body responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreation purposes. The body has its headquarters in Enniskillen, with regional offices in Scariff, Carrick-on-Shannon and Dublin.

Irish Coast Guard Services



Maritime Rescue Centres and Coast Radio Stations

Dublin MRCC

Irish Coast Guard
Leeson Lane
Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 6620922
Fax: (01) 6620795

Valentia MRSC

Valentia Island
Co. Kerry
Tel: (066) 9476109
Fax: (066) 9476289

Malin Head MRSC

Malin Head
Co. Donegal
Tel: (074) 9370103
Fax: (074) 9370221

How to join the Yacht and Boat Safety Scheme – it's free and could help save your life.

- Complete the enclosed questionnaire in ink and send it to the Irish Coast Guard, Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Leeson Lane, Dublin 2.
- Enclose a recent photograph of your craft, if you have one.
- Please fill in the information on the section to the left of the form, cut it off and give it to someone ashore who is concerned with your safety.
- If the ownership, name of craft, an address given or the craft's appearance (colour etc.) changes in any way, please inform the Irish Coast Guard.
- This card is valid for three years. If it is not renewed within that time, it will be considered invalid and removed from our records.

Name of craft:

Address of the Maritime Rescue Centre which holds details of this craft:

Dublin MRCC
Irish Coast Guard
Headquarters
Leeson Lane
Dublin 2

Tel: (01) 6620922
Fax: (01) 6620795

email: admin@IRISHCOASTGUARD.ie

If you are worried about the safety of this craft, please contact the Irish Coast Guard

In an emergency dial 112/999 and ask for the Coast Guard



YACHT AND BOAT SAFETY SCHEME

Name of Craft: How and where is the name displayed: Type of rig: Speed and endurance under power: Details of radio: HF MF Trans/Rec: VHF Channels and call sign: MMSI No: Other equipment: Type of distress signals carried: Dinghy type: Colour: Life raft type: Serial No: Are life jackets carried?		Sailing or fishing number: Colour of craft: Hull above water: below water: Superstructure: Sail: Spinnaker: Length: feet: metres: Details of any special identification features: Usual base: Usual mooring: Usual activity (eg fishing, racing etc): Usual sea areas:	
Details of owner: Name: Address: Tel. No: Signature: Date: Details of Shore Contact: Name: Address: Tel. No: Name of club or Association:			

Also available in the Safety on the Water range

Our range of **FREE** Safety on the Water booklets give
the essential safety information that you need
– whatever you do on the water.

Sports and subjects include:

Sailing
Motorboating
Powerboating
Windsurfing
Diving
Sea angling

To order any of these booklets, or to find out more about
free water safety advice, contact any of the organisations
listed on page 29



Department of Communications,
Marine and Natural Resources

