

I attended the BC Safety at Sea one-day seminar given by Sail Canada and BC Sailing at SNSYC, yesterday March 17, 2018. This event had been advertised to all Clubs and the SISC FCR circulated an email notice in January inviting any interested people to sign up. The room was full, with sailors from Victoria, local Clubs and Navy, up Island, and WA and OR. The seminar goal was to improve safety in coastal events. It is organized and sponsored by a working group from WVYC for Southern Straits, RVYC, Vic-Maui, RVYC, Swiftsure, and Blast Performance Sailing, Van Isle 360. I provide this report because I feel that attending the event was a very good use of a day, and to tell anyone considering it that they will likely find it similarly useful. The motivation for the taking this "course" was the reminder from the Race Chair for Patos, also circulated recently, that boats would do well to have a number of their crew current (last five years) in matters of basic boating/racing safety. It is not a requirement for Patos, just a common-sense request from the organizers of one of our regular races on the circuit. The longer offshore races have actual requirements.

Everyone involved in teaching and organizing the seminar was a seasoned sailor and a willing volunteer. The cost to participants, \$84.00, covered the usual basics of general organizing, lunch, presentation handouts, but also more unusually, review and use of boats, real gear and expendables; an example of the latter is watching the PFDs auto-inflate on our rescue dummies after they fell overboard for the first time in the MOB training.

The presenters were well known local racers, who are in this for no other reason than to promote safety in both thinking and practice. The material covered in the classroom was extensive and real, ranging from cold weather/water/hypothermia basics likely already familiar to those of us with regular first-aid courses (e.g., 1 minute to control your panic breathing when you hit the water, 10 minutes of effective motor control of your limbs, one hour for hypothermia to be dealt with), weather and heavy weather measures, emergency signals and the SAR cavalry (there are many advances in technology and it's getting better, and cheaper for us to have the right gear), to personal safety gear (new PFDs, good and bad tethers, new personal AIS and e-Locators, combination strobes, etc.) and our individual responsibility on a racing boat to not be a preventable/obvious weakest link. All very good stuff, and for me an excellent reminder of a number of things because I had not kept up on all developments, or had only passing awareness of new resources covering our waters on both sides of the International Boundary, or had not really practiced new protocols (detailed here by professional sailors and rescuers).

But the highlight for me and best value of the day were the practical exercises. Split into teams of six with a coach/leader, we spent the better part of two hours in the morning on board one of five boats made available by local owners, going through the part of the MOB retrieval exercise which crews seldom practice in training. Part one, the "MOB! Stop-the-boat, deploy Lifesling, circle under power or sail, secure the Oscar (victim) in the water alongside, pick up the fender or life

ring” sequence was assumed to be something we all knew how to do as crew and which our boat/skipper practices it regularly (yes?). It was Part Two, the real-life retrieval of an inert (or verging on - ) human onto the boat that was the focus of the hands-on training. In theoretical conditions of 20 knot wind, 4 foot waves, 6 C water, and possible darkness, we were made to consider all of those factors from the victim’s vantage as well as ours to effect the rescue without further injury or mishap. The fact that it was sunny, calm, and relaxed just made it more obvious that a practiced sequence of steps was necessary and would be even more so in the dark and waves, as no crew got it perfect at every step. The “victim” was a svelte but unresponsive dummy in a wet suit, human sized, weighing 120-lb dry but with increasing waterlogging as time went on. It is a sobering reality that it takes at least two people to handle such a body, even with secure footing and more helpful hands, and that is just to toss them into the water; now, get them back alive. Once his/her PFD had gone off, we had to retrieve him/her onboard four times: rescued and conscious with Lifesling on, floating/unconscious and us having to slip the Lifesling on the body for hoisting, then no Lifesling available just any lines on the boat for an improvised sling, and finally a horizontal lift out of the water using two improvised slings. Halyards, winches, boat hooks, hanging on to the rescuing crew to keep them on the boat, etc. were all part of the picture, with four successful lifts of the victim over the lifelines and onto deck for assessment and subsequent first aid/hypothermia treatment. Adrenaline flowed for all of us, and the clock was ticking (see 1 – 10 - 1 above), but we all felt that we could do it next time, and more importantly, could direct the rest of a green crew to do it next time. It is this aspect of spreading the knowledge for collective safety that the seminar had as main goal.

The afternoon practical focused on an evaluation of our own personal safety gear, and advances in that area. We all had to bring our own PFD with harness to the seminar, tether, and strobe light. These were reviewed and deployed (we all inflated our PFDs using the mouth tube, and repacked everything; managed not to trigger anyone’s CO2 cartridge apart from Oscar the water dummies in the morning). We were shown new(ish) and small AIS MOB devices, handheld VHF’s with DSC, new personal locator beacons using the 406 MHz frequency, electronic flares and other technology, and it is clear that the evolution of organized SAR services continues in a most positive direction to our collective benefit. All the more reason to not abuse the system and take responsibility for your own safety in an active manner.

I hope that this report gives food for thought to all of us, as I highly recommend the experience as a part of your toolbox.

Philippe

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