

RISK MANAGEMENT and SAILING

Sailing, as all sports or activities, has inherent risks. However, by assessing the risk and taking appropriate actions to minimize it, one can reduce the risks to a level that is acceptable to the individual. If we do not manage the risk properly, we will find ourselves overwhelmed by a situation and ill-prepared or equipped to deal with it.



The **occurrence/event** could be any one of a number of things, or a combination of them:

- Collision
- Grounding
- Caught in a storm
- Crew overboard
- Leak
- Stubbing a toe
- Etc.



The **cost or implication** of an occurrence could be very small, or lead to the complete loss of the boat or even life.

Sailors need to pay the most attention to the events that could have the greatest implications on the safety of crew and vessel.

We can minimize the risks associated with sailing, by reducing the chances of an occurrence from happening or reduce the costs or implications associated with the occurrence. This will increase the safety to our crew and vessel.

Analyzing the risk of a crew overboard:

1. Reduce the chance of a COB from happening by wearing a harness and tether, wearing proper footwear, keeping decks tidy and using proper communication with crew
2. A COB has a cost associated with it of hypothermia or even drowning. These cost/implications can be reduced by wearing proper clothing and PFD's

By multiplying these two factors together, the risks involved in a COB are greatly minimized

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The cost/implication of an occurrence can also change in varying conditions. The chances of COB victim being overcome by hypothermia are much greater in early season sailing than in mid summer.

It is also possible for risks to change rapidly while underway

- Developing storm
- Crew member becomes ill or injured
- Equipment malfunction

The risks associated with continuing your sail must be re-evaluated and appropriate actions taken

Fortunately, crewmembers will generally begin to behave with a heightened sense of awareness as the level of risk increases, and become more cautious.

Reduce the probability of an occurrence from happening by establishing an effective safety management system on the vessel. This will help you identify unsafe conditions and practices and address them accordingly

1. Prepare yourself

- a. Educate yourself
- b. Get experience on the water
- c. Know your limitations

2. Prepare the boat

- a. Be vigilant about boat checks
- b. Take care of deficiencies immediately
- c. Be familiar with all boat systems

3. Know your crew

- a. Understand their limitations
- b. Conduct a safety briefing

4. Obtain weather forecasts

- a. Current weather
- b. Keep updating while underway
- c. Continuous eye on the sky

5. Effective on board communication

- a. Clear and complete
- b. Well understood

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As skippers gain more experience and familiarity with their vessels, they may become complacent and lose sight of the risks associated with the sport . Skippers may make assumptions about their vessel and may become sloppy with their boat checks. Crew safety briefings and communication may also become lax. This is a recipe for disaster!

Remember that most incidents occur as a result of a long chain of seemingly harmless decisions, mistakes, mechanical malfunctions and external factors (weather or other vessels). If we remove any one of these links or change their order of occurrence, the outcome will be totally different.

An effective safety management system should have a process of risk identification and assessment and have management strategies for dealing with the risks associated with sailing.

For a risk management system to be effective there must also be a provision for the crew members to report their concerns and discrepancies to the skipper. If this formality does not exist, then crew members may also make assumptions that could be detrimental to their safety and that of the vessel.

A prudent skipper must be able to identify and understand the risks associated with sailing and take all measures possible to minimize these risks prior to heading out on the water. A skipper who understands these risks and the limitations of him/herself, their crew and the boat will be able to make appropriate decisions that will enhance the safety to crew and boat.