

# Generic Risk Assessment – Dinghy Sailing (St Denys Boat Club)

**Activity:** Dinghy Sailing (generic) – club sessions, cruising and social sailing

**Location:** River Itchen / Southampton Water (as appropriate to session)

**Activity Type:** Self-led and/or supervised sailing depending on event listing

**Date last reviewed:** 23 January 2026

**Assessor:** James Wardle

**Reviewed by:**

**Review due:** January 2027

## Scope and Context

This generic risk assessment covers dinghy sailing activities organised by St Denys Boat Club, including club sailing sessions and short cruising / training style outings where appropriate. It is intended as a baseline document to be used alongside event-specific planning (route, tide, weather, experience levels, and boat types).

Dinghy sailing involves immersion risk, capsize, collision hazards, and environmental exposure. Risks increase significantly in strong wind, cold water, reduced visibility, busy waterways, and when sailing near obstructions, moorings, or shipping lanes.

## Additional Controls (Club Specific)

- Buoyancy aids/lifejackets mandatory for all persons afloat. Individuals must wear a suitable, correctly fitted buoyancy aid.
- Participants must consider weather, tide and daylight; organisers/leads may shorten or cancel activity if conditions are unsuitable.
- Where supervision applies: a nominated session lead is responsible for group briefings, boundaries and on-water decision making.
- When sailing in tidal waters and/or outside the immediate club area, skippers should be appropriately experienced (e.g. RYA Seamanship Skills or equivalent) and competent in capsize recovery.
- Sailing in company: boats should remain within hailing distance and maintain fleet discipline (do not sail off alone).

- Vessels must be checked for obvious defects before launch (rigging, sails, foils, buoyancy, painter, bailers). Defective boats must be quarantined and reported.
- Carry a means of communication: mobile phone in waterproof case and/or VHF where appropriate. Emergency plan and exit points considered.
- Cold water / immersion guidance shared with members; participants to dress for the water temperature not the air temperature.

## Risk Assessment Table

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk	Control Measures	Risk Level	Further Actions / Changes
Drowning	All persons afloat	Serious injury or death	Buoyancy aids/lifejackets worn at all times. Correct sizing/fit. RYA guidance followed.	Low-Medium	Re-brief at start of season / new members
Capsize (with/without inversion)	All	Immersion, injury, boat loss	Capsize recovery training encouraged. Sail in company. In higher capsize likelihood: fewer boats / more people per boat and additional support.	Medium	Consider safety boat cover for training sessions
Entrapment underwater	All	Panic, drowning	Right the boat quickly. Other boats assist. Skippers in tidal waters expected to have inversion recovery competence (e.g. Seamanship Skills).	Medium	Promote inversion recovery practice
Exposure – cold/wind chill	All	Hypothermia, poor judgement	Dress for conditions; carry extra layers. Look out for signs in others and act early.	Low-Medium	Shorten session in winter
Exposure – heat/sun	All	Heat stroke, sunburn	Hat/suncream; hydration; plan breaks.	Low	Remind via event listing
Dehydration / hunger	All	Fatigue, reduced judgement	Water and snacks carried. Shorten or stop if needed.	Low	Encourage personal responsibility
Cold water shock	All	Panic, breathing difficulty	Appropriate clothing; awareness guidance shared (e.g. Float to Live principles).	Medium	Extra caution in early season
Head injury / concussion	All	Injury	RYA training; wind/boom awareness; controlled manoeuvres.	Low-Medium	Consider helmets in stronger winds/training
Other physical injuries (fingers/rope burns)	All	Minor-moderate injury	Training/familiarity; maintain equipment; gloves recommended in higher loads.	Low	Brief safe rope handling
Delayed treatment due to location	All	Worsening injury/illness	Keep plans flexible. Treat urgent issues as emergencies. Carry comms. Club boats may	Low-Medium	Confirm access/egress points

			carry smoke where appropriate.		
Collision between dinghies / with large vessels	Club members; other users	Injury, damage	Rules of the road knowledge. Good lookout. Passage planning to minimise time in higher risk zones. Cross channels efficiently.	Medium-High	Avoid shipping lane training for novices
Collision with swimmers near shore	Swimmers; crew	Injury	Good lookout. Controlled landings; depower sails (drop main/jib) when approaching beach.	Low-Medium	Choose quieter landing areas
Trips/slips/strains ashore (boat handling)	Club members	Injury	Good practice and teamwork. Avoid rushing. Suitable footwear.	Low	Use lift/move marshals when needed
Lifting boats down beach	Club members	Back strain, crush injury	Appoint lift master; ensure enough people; controlled movement; use roller bags; only those fit enough lift.	Low-Medium	Stop if insufficient helpers
Moving dinghy on trolley across uneven foreshore	Club members	Injury, boat damage	Fit-for-purpose trolley/tyres. Consider floating on tide instead. Appoint move master. Remove heavy items and control speed.	Low-Medium	Reassess route on day
Rigging injuries ashore	Club members	Cuts, impact injuries	Training and familiarity; controlled rigging area; keep children supervised.	Low	Brief hazards to new members
Poor visibility (fog/low light)	All	Collision, navigation error	Check forecast. Use compass/landmarks. Cancel/shorten if visibility poor.	Medium	Ensure lights for late return
Challenging weather (too much/too little wind)	All	Capsize, inability to return	Forecast check. Reefing competence. Contingency sail plan. Do not sail in unsafe forecast (e.g. F6).	Medium-High	Define club wind limits per boat type
Wildlife (swans/geese)	All	Attack, capsize	Keep clear of wildlife at launch/recovery. Follow bylaws and minimise disturbance.	Low	Brief seasonal aggression risk
Entanglement (lines, weed, moorings)	All	Capsize, injury	Lookout. Avoid mooring fields. Carry knife (where appropriate) and know how to free entanglement.	Low-Medium	Add knife/line cutter guidance
Submerged objects (rocks/debris)	All	Hull damage, injury	Passage planning and lookout. Know where to beach if holed.	Low-Medium	Update local hazard knowledge
Running aground	All	Stuck, damage, delay	Understand tidal range and depth. Keep lookout. Plan route to avoid shallows.	Low-Medium	Plan around high water for novices
Strong tidal streams affecting plan	All	Unable to complete, fatigue	Tidal planning. Adjust plan. Carry paddles; consider outboard depending on conditions.	Medium	Abort early if slow progress
Distress / assistance required	All	Rescue needed	Carry comms (phone/VHF). Sail in company. Emergency plan.	Low-Medium	Confirm shore contact procedure
Gear failure / equipment damage	All	Loss of control, injury	Regular checks/maintenance. Quarantine faulty kit.	Low-Medium	Improve defect reporting process
Outboard manual handling / lifting (if carried)	Club members	Strains, crush injury	Training and good practice. Maintain mounts. Team lift where required.	Low	Avoid carrying unless needed

Fuel management (leak/fire/environment)	All	Fire, pollution	Approved containers. Small quantities. Safe storage and handling.	Low	Brief spill response
Outboard failure when required	All	Drift, delay	Always have sails and paddles. Maintain engine and check before voyage.	Low-Medium	Avoid reliance on engine
Propeller injury to people in water	All; swimmers	Severe injury	Kill cord used. Training offered. Engine off near people in water.	Low	Reinforce kill cord rule
Trailer/winch injury	Club members	Crush injury	Training in trailer/winch use; controlled operation.	Low	Assign competent operator
Falling overboard (MOB)	All	Drowning, hypothermia	MOB training and sailing in company. Other vessels assist.	Medium	Practise talk-through at start of season
Towing hazards	Club members	Line injury, trapped fingers	Towing led by experienced members. Suitable towlines carried and rigged appropriately.	Low-Medium	Run towing skills refresher
Anchoring hazards	Club members; beach users	Trip hazard, collision, dragging	Mindful positioning of anchors/lines. Experience/training encouraged. Ask for help if unsure.	Low-Medium	Brief safe anchor use
Navigation error / getting lost	All	Delay, exposure, entering hazards	Team planning and sail plan review. Maintain situational awareness.	Low-Medium	Keep to simple routes for novices
Communication issues / fleet splitting	All	Separation, delayed help	Fleet discipline. Stay within hailing distance. Regroup if separated.	Low-Medium	Nominate lead/sweep boats
Inexperienced sailors/crew	All	Exacerbation of all hazards	Plan activity to match experience. Encourage speaking up. Offer training and mentoring.	Medium	Consider supervised sessions for novices
Biohazards (Weil's disease/algae/pollution)	All	Illness	Wash hands, cover cuts, rinse equipment. Be alert to symptoms.	Low	Add seasonal health reminders
Pre-existing medical conditions	Individuals	Medical emergency afloat	Encourage disclosure where relevant. Individuals carry medication. Treat emergencies as such.	Low-Medium	Ensure emergency contacts available

## General Notes

- This is a generic risk assessment. Event-specific risk assessment and planning are recommended
- Skippers/Supervisors are responsible for dynamic risk assessment and may stop or shorten activities for safety reasons.
- Participants remain responsible for their own decisions and must not exceed their competence.
- This risk assessment should be reviewed annually or following any incident or near miss.