

Risk Assessment – Sailing Passage to Cowes / Newport

Activity: Supervised small craft passage (sailing cruiser / dayboat)

Location: St Denys Boat Club (River Itchen) to Cowes Harbour and/or Newport (River Medina), Solent

Activity Type: Supervised club passage – skipper-led dynamic risk management

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Reviewed by: Steve Everitt

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Scope and Context

This risk assessment covers a supervised sailing passage from St Denys Boat Club to Cowes Harbour and optionally onward to Newport via the River Medina. The route passes through the Port of Southampton approaches and Southampton Water, where there is frequent large commercial shipping, fast passenger services, tugs and tows, and high volumes of leisure traffic. The Cowes approach is frequently congested and includes the Cowes Chain Ferry crossing. The passage is planned and led by a competent skipper who retains overall responsibility for navigation, crew safety, and dynamic risk management. The plan may be modified, delayed, or cancelled based on weather, tide, traffic density, or crew capability.

Participant Responsibilities

All crew are responsible for acting in a manner that supports their own safety and the safety of the vessel. Crew must follow the skipper's instructions, wear lifejackets/buoyancy aids as directed (normally at all times on deck), maintain a lookout when assigned, keep clear of commercial shipping and ferry operations, and report promptly if cold, fatigued, unwell, or unsure of an instruction. Crew must not distract the helmsman in busy areas and should be ready to assist with lines, fenders, reefs, and emergency procedures if requested.

Risk Assessment Table

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk	Control Measures (Port / Harbour guidance aligned)	Risk Level	Further Actions
Large commercial ships and cruise/containership manoeuvres in Southampton Water	All on board	Collision; severe injury; vessel damage	Route planned to minimise time near the main channel; maintain continuous lookout; do not impede vessels constrained by draught; cross shipping lanes promptly at 90° when safe; monitor Southampton VTS as appropriate; ensure engine available for avoidance	High	Skipper to brief on 'constrained by draught' indicators and avoidance strategy
Fast passenger services (Red Jet/Red Funnel) and other ferries near Cowes and in Southampton Water	All on board	High wash, close-quarters situations, collision risk	Avoid loitering in ferry tracks; anticipate high speed and rapid course changes; maintain safe speed and decisive manoeuvres; keep well clear of piers and ferry approaches; tighten crew discipline in congestion	High	Agree 'no-go' zones near ferry piers and approach lines in pre-brief
Cowes Chain Ferry crossing (right of way)	All on board / other river users	Collision in narrow channel; wash and loss of control	Slow down early; assess traffic; do not cut across ferry line; establish early VHF contact with 'Cowes Chain Ferry' and comply with instructions where practicable; prepare for accelerated tidal flow and blind-bend effects	High	Assign dedicated lookout approaching the ferry
Congested Cowes approach and harbour entrance (leisure craft density,	All on board / other leisure craft	Collision, entanglement, loss of control	Approach at safe speed; maintain clear separation; prepare fenders/lines early; maintain steerage; avoid sudden course changes; consider timing to	High	Use holding area offshore if overcrowded

inexperienced crews)			avoid peak arrivals		
Bramble Bank and adjacent shoals (grounding hazard, reduced manoeuvrability)	All on board	Grounding; hull/keel damage; delay in traffic	Use up-to-date charts/GPS; maintain depth awareness; follow buoyage; avoid short-cutting; plan for tide height; keep clear of known shallow areas	Medium	Add a minimum depth trigger for route changes
Tugs and tows – difficulty interpreting movement/intent	All on board / other vessels	Collision with tug or tow line	Assume restricted ability to manoeuvre; give wide berth; look for tow lines/objects; do not pass between tug and tow; avoid crossing close ahead; use VHF if uncertain	High	Brief crew on tow configurations and safe passing rules
Strong tides, wind-against-tide and overfalls in the Solent	All on board	Loss of control; seasickness; fatigue	Plan with tide tables and forecast; reef early; maintain safe sail plan; use engine as needed; choose sheltered options and abort points; avoid overfall areas in adverse conditions	Medium	Define clear weather/tide go/no-go thresholds
Restricted visibility (rain, haze, sun glare)	All on board / other water users	Collision or grounding	Enhanced lookout; reduce speed; use navigation lights as appropriate; avoid tight manoeuvres; delay/cancel if visibility poor	Medium	Check working lights and sound signal device
Engine failure in high-traffic area	All on board	Loss of avoidance capability; drift into channel	Pre-departure checks; adequate fuel; anchor ready; sails ready; VHF ready for assistance	High	Mandatory engine test run before departure
Man overboard (MOB) / crew overboard	Individual overboard	Drowning; hypothermia; injury	Lifejackets worn; MOB briefing and drill; throwable aid accessible; assign spotter; recover using engine and/or sail as trained	High	Confirm recovery plan suitable for vessel and crew strength

Slips/trips/falls on deck, especially in harbour manoeuvres	Crew	Injury; falling overboard	Good housekeeping; non-slip footwear; move only when safe; use grab points; skipper controls deck work	Medium	Brief 'one hand for the boat' rule
Nightfall or late return	All on board	Navigation error; fatigue	Conservative schedule; working navigation lights; torches; warm clothing; safe harbour contingency	Medium	Set latest safe departure times
Navigation errors (Cowes/Newport approaches, Medina channel, moorings)	All on board / other water users	Grounding; collision with moorings or craft	Pilotage plan with waypoints; slow speed in confined waters; dedicated lookout; avoid cutting corners	Medium	Prepare pilotage annex for Cowes and Medina
High volumes of leisure craft (regattas, weekends)	All on board / other craft	Multi-vessel incidents	Defensive navigation; extra lookout; clear skipper commands; increase separation distances; avoid peak events	Medium	Check local event calendars and notices to mariners

General Notes

- Consistent with Port of Southampton leisure guidance and Southampton VTS practices, and Cowes Harbour navigation notices.
- Skipper retains overall responsibility for dynamic risk management and may modify the plan at any time.
- File a float plan with a shore contact including route, crew list, and ETA.
- VHF: monitor the appropriate port/harbour working channels for the area; Channel 16 for distress only.
- Review annually or following any incident, near miss, or significant route change.