



# SWIFTSURE INTERNATIONAL YACHT RACE

Hosted by the Royal Victoria Yacht Club

May 24 -25, 2025

Victoria, British Columbia



## **Swiftsure International Yacht Race Safety Policy 2025**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This document outlines the key aspects of safety measures and processes used by the Swiftsure Organizing Authority and the Race Committee. It also provides the rationale for the designated category of the races within the Safety Equipment Requirements and the exceptions that have been made to the requirements.

### **ORGANIZING AUTHORITY**

The Royal Victoria Yacht Club (RVYC) has a Program Committee that has delegated responsibility to act as the Organizing Authority (OA) for the Swiftsure International Yacht Race. The members of this Swiftsure Committee are all volunteers, with administrative support provided by RVYC office staff. The Principal Race Officer (PRO) for the race sits on this committee; other members are the Race Event Chair, Race Director, Registrar, Technology Lead, Media Relations Lead, Logistics Lead, Webmaster, and Volunteer Coordinator.

The OA issues the Notices of Race (NoRs) while the PRO is responsible for issuing the Sailing Instructions (SIs) and for running the race. Duty Race Officers (DRO) and members of the Race Committee report to the PRO. The Official Judge for the race is a World Sailing International Judge.

Safety is an overriding priority in all aspects of running the race. There is a healthy safety culture within the Swiftsure Committee which encourages continuous improvement, and suggestions are welcome from everyone. Steps are taken to ensure good communication with the racing fleet during the race. A close working relationship exists with the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) Victoria and Marine Communication and Traffic Services (MCTS) during advance planning and during the race.

### **RUNNING THE RACE**

The Swiftsure International Yacht Race is composed of Three Long Courses and the Swiftsure Inshore Race. The courses are as follows:

### **Three Long Courses**

1. **Swiftsure Lightship Classic Race for Monohulls** - from a starting line at Clover Point, rounding a Swiftsure Bank temporary marker to port, and crossing a finish line across the Victoria Harbour – 138.2 NM
2. **Cape Flattery Race for Monohulls** - from a starting line at Clover Point, leaving an anchored vessel off the entrance to Neah Bay to port, and crossing a finish line across the Victoria Harbour – 101.9 NM.
3. **Juan de Fuca Race for and Monhulls and Multihulls** - from a starting line at Clover Point, leaving a green navigational mark at the southern entrance to Clallam Bay to port, and crossing a finish line across the Victoria Harbour – 75.2 NM

### **Swiftsure Inshore Race**

There are two separate divisions for monohull boats: Racing and Cruising. The PRO determines the course for each of the races after consideration of the weather and tidal currents predictions, and this is announced to racers on the morning of the race. The racecourse area is from the starting line at Clover Point to a finish line at Cadboro Bay near the Royal Victoria Yacht Club. The course(s) are selected from marks in Juan de Fuca Strait (adjacent to the city of Victoria) and southern Haro Strait.

## **WEATHER MONITORING**

A Meteorology Monitoring Protocol (to track actual and forecast winds) has been implemented and is reviewed annually to ensure it is current, and accounts for lessons learned from prior years and input from various sources such as other races, Environment Canada, and the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) Victoria. Necessary steps are taken to ensure up-to-date information is received from Environment Canada concerning wind and wave observations and predictions prior to the start and during the race, and arrangements are in place for briefings from Environment Canada should wind warnings/advisories be issued. During the race, the PRO and Duty Race Officers monitor the weather on the racecourses, and when the actual or forecast wind is for gale or higher, they monitor weather observations in various locations of the racing area as outlined in the Meteorology Monitoring Protocol.

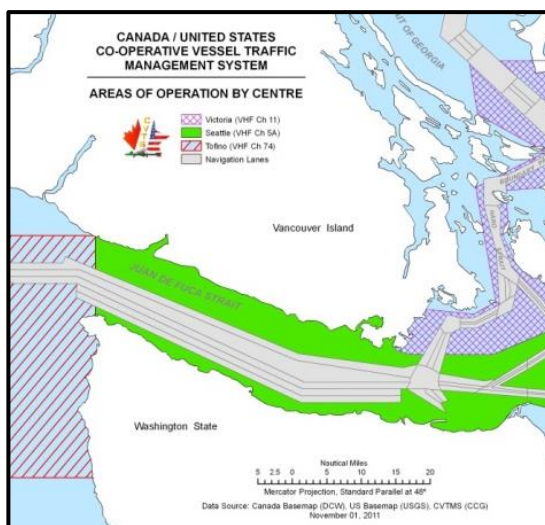
## **RACE ENVIRONMENT**

The Juan de Fuca Strait poses a number of challenges for Swiftsure racers, and the Organizing Authority implements measures to continually assess and mitigate risks. Not all racers are accustomed to sailing in such waters where commercial vessels can be steaming at 20+ knots.

There is a Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) which is recognized by the International Maritime Organization, in the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Haro Strait. Puget Sound Vessel Traffic Service ("Seattle Traffic") and the Victoria and Prince Rupert MCTS (Marine Communications and Traffic Services) Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) Centres ("Victoria Traffic" and "Prince Rupert Traffic") provide timely information to participating vessels regarding traffic movement, weather, and hazards to navigation.

Swiftsure boats are not participating vessels in the TSS, and therefore are not required to report and obtain a traffic clearance when crossing the TSS. This further necessitates those boats be vigilant in keeping a constant watch.

Naval vessels most often do not broadcast an Automatic Identification System (AIS) transmission, but Seattle Traffic, Victoria Traffic, and Prince Rupert Traffic are aware of location, direction and speed of these vessels.



There is a relatively strong current that can set up a steep wave pattern when opposed by wind. Fog can occur as well to impede visibility, and racers will be sailing at night to further the challenge.

The water itself poses another consideration – a prevailing sea temperature of  $\sim 10^{\circ}\text{C}$  means cold water shock, muscle incapacitation, and the risk of hypothermia exists if a racer is swept overboard. And the risk of drowning is increased significantly if the person in the water is not wearing a personal flotation device. Crew Overboard (COB) recovery is a challenge and even more so at night.

While there have been instances of COB, dismasting, and grounding in some previous races, there has only been a single fatality (in 1976) since Swiftsure's inception in 1930.

## **SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

In response to the risks involved in racing, the Organizing Authority ensures key measures are implemented to keep participants well informed and mitigate those risks. This includes, but is not limited to, the following actions.

### **Weather**

An experienced meteorologist provides a weather briefing at the Skippers' Meeting the afternoon prior to the race. The PRO and Duty ROs follow Swiftsure's Meteorology Monitoring Protocol when making a decision about whether to start or postpone the start, or abandon races in one or more courses in the event of existing or forecast high winds and hazardous sea states.

### **Commercial Shipping**

A commercial pilot provides a presentation on the perspective of what commercial ships operating within the commercial shipping lanes observe from their bridges. This is provided to help educate participants on the importance of following safety protocols when sailboat racing in areas with a large volume of commercial traffic operating within a Traffic Separation Scheme.

Notice of Race ADDENDUM C APPENDIX TS - Traffic Separation Schemes provides the application

of the Racing Rules of Sailing to operating within commercial shipping lanes, and requirements for compliance, and enforcement action which can be taken against race participants who impede shipping.

### **Crew Lists**

Having accurate crew lists for every competing boat before they cross the start line is emphasized. Skippers or their designates are able to enter their crew lists, together with emergency contact names and telephone numbers, when they register online, and these lists can be updated as required. When Skippers check in at the Swiftsure Centre prior to the race, a mandatory requirement, they are asked to review online their crew list and assistance is given to amend it if needed. Also, boats are expected to advise Swiftsure Communications the morning of the race, should they have any last-minute crew changes.

The Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) Victoria has direct access to the electronic crew lists during the race should they be needed for a SAR incident.

### **Communication with Fleet**

Notwithstanding Racing Rules of Sailing's Fundamental Racing Rule #4 ("The responsibility for a boat's decision to participate in a race or to continue racing is hers alone."), one of the key aspects of safety is the ability to communicate with racers for the duration of the race or, should an abandonment of the race be necessary, until they reach a safe haven. It is also necessary to keep in contact with boats which have withdrawn from the race until they reach safe haven. This is accomplished through use of calling and texting using cellular technology. The Strait of Juan de Fuca has cellular coverage, through both Canadian and American providers.

Traditional VHF radio provides a further tool for communication among the fleet and race committee and is the primary method of communication with SAR resources. Boats in the Swiftsure Lightship Classic may not experience full cellular coverage west of Cape Flattery. Skippers and navigators are reminded in the Sailing Instructions of the need to monitor VHF 26 in case they are hailed by the Race Committee via MCTS or Seattle Traffic. It is stated in the Sailing Instructions that if a competitor requires emergency assistance, they should contact the Coast Guard on VHF 16, and use the Digital Selective Calling (DSC) on their VHF radios which would alert other race boats within VHF range.

For all long course participants, boats must carry a charged cellular or satellite phone onboard, and the number is registered with the OA. The phone must be kept switched on and continually monitored for incoming communication from the race committee.

Cellular coverage over the racecourse in some locations is only provided by Canadian providers, and in other locations only by American providers. Participants who utilize Canadian cellular service providers will be required to purchase roaming services from the American providers (and vice versa) to ensure coverage over the full racecourse. Carrying satellite phones is not mandatory, but for those who have it aboard it provides more reliable coverage, where cellular coverage may be limited. Satellite phones are strongly recommended for boats in the Swiftsure Lightship Classic where cellular coverage may be limited west of Cape Flattery. Starlink technology may also be used.

A VHF radio with DSC capability must also be on board. A back up radio and additional batteries should also be carried. The power must be kept on with the volume audible. Applicable channels shall be monitored and utilized as required and as noted in the Sailing Instructions; competitors shall monitor channel 16 throughout the race.

## **Location of Commercial Vessels**

To assist Swiftsure boats to keep a watch, avoid collision, impeding or obstructing fast-moving commercial vessels, the Seattle Traffic, Victoria Traffic, and Prince Rupert Traffic make half hourly broadcasts on VHF channel 09 of commercial traffic in real time (i.e., current position of vessels, direction, and speed) at 15 minutes and 45 minutes past the hour. These broadcasts cover all of the TSS areas located within the racecourses. The Sailing Instructions indicate that all boats shall monitor VHF channel 09 for Vessel Traffic Services ("VTS") broadcasts in the following circumstances, even if monitoring Automatic Identification System (AIS):

- Before entering a VTS Lane; and
- While operating in a VTS Lane or in a VTS Separation Zone.

In the Rules section, the Sailing Instructions reinforce that boats shall not impede or obstruct commercial traffic and further that a boat whose actions or manoeuvres result in a danger signal (5 or more blasts) from commercial or military traffic shall be protested by the race committee.

Even those boats that monitor AIS transmissions while racing are advised to listen to the VTS commercial shipping broadcasts prior to entering and while within VTS Lane or VTS Separation Zones. This is because the US Navy is not obligated to transmit AIS information so these potential hazards will remain unknown to racers if they do not monitor the VTS broadcasts. Similarly, the position of commercial vessels that have a malfunctioning AIS transmitter would otherwise remain unknown.

## **Location of Fleet**

Knowing the location of competing boats is important, but it is not expected that exact locations will be always known due to technology limitations. However, key steps have been taken for the Three Long Courses to ensure the general locations of all boats are known.

Boats participating in the Three Long Courses are required to check in with the race committee and confirm their number of crew prior to the start of the race. This procedure, initiated for the 2018 race, is intended to ensure the race committee knows which vessels actually started the race, and are continuing racing.

All boats in the Three Long Courses are monitored in the Kwindoo Race Tracking app, which feeds position data on board each race vessel about every 15 minutes to the Tracker System. While this is not part of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (an EPIRB *is* part of the GMDSS, for example), it does provide valuable information provided that crews keep the associated onboard mobile phone linked with the Kwindoo app and the phone's batteries charged and functioning throughout the race. Experience has demonstrated that transmission is not fail-safe so launching a SAR activity when a boat ceases to transmit may or may not be justified.

The PRO will discuss with the JRCC any concerns about non-reporting units as part of the decision process of whether a SAR should be initiated. Intermediate steps include the race committee attempting a text/voice call to the boat's onboard mobile phone, contact via DSC, MCTS broadcasting on VHF channel 16, and announcements by VTS during their half-hourly broadcasts on VHF 09. In addition, during the MCTS half-hourly broadcast, the whole fleet, or via VHF 16, can be asked about where and when any competitors had visually seen the applicable boat.

Other steps are taken to monitor the locations of boats. Boats in the Swiftsure Lightship Classic (going to Swiftsure Bank) are required to proactively report their position via text message when crossing the 124 degrees 40 minutes West meridian (both outbound and inbound) near the

western end of Juan de Fuca Strait. When these boats transit west of this meridian, they may become more difficult to track as cellular coverage diminishes. This measure aids in identifying which boats are entering or exiting this western extent of the racecourse.

Boats in the Cape Flattery and Juan de Fuca courses are also required to report their positions when they reach locations specified in the Sailing Instructions. This reporting process provides an additional check-in, helping to monitor the fleet and providing additional data should a boat's precise location need to be ascertained for safety reasons.

The Inshore Race is a day race, so there is no need to have boats report their position when racing. Most boats are within a short distance of each other and will be within view except in the case of fog. Communication with the boats in the Inshore Race is possible using VHF 26 and, in the event of an emergency, mariners are expected to contact the Coast Guard using VHF 16 or other means of communications.

### **Minimum Safety Requirements**

Ensuring a boat is seaworthy, adequately equipped, and has an experienced crew with sufficient ability to face bad weather is the sole and inescapable responsibility of the person in charge of each boat. Skippers (Persons in Charge) confirm that they accept this responsibility when they register to enter Swiftsure.

The requirements as indicated in the World Sailing Offshore Special Regulations (OSRs) for Monohulls and Multihulls Category 3 (as appropriate) as amended by B.C. Sailing and/or the Swiftsure Organizing Authority, which is covered by the Notices of Race, states: "The person in charge of each boat shall ensure that all competitors in the crew and the boat's owner are aware of their responsibilities under this rule."

Fundamental rule 3 in World Sailing's Racing Rules of Sailing, which govern the race (covered in the Notices of Race and Sailing Instructions), states: "DECISION TO RACE - The responsibility for a boat's decision to participate in a race or to continue *racing* is hers alone."

The online registration form contains a liability waiver which must be checked that the registrant agrees before they can proceed to the remaining registration process.

In order to reinforce the need for boats to be safely prepared for the Three Long Courses, each boat, upon finishing, must proceed to the inspection dock where they are greeted and may be subjected to an inspection of the Safety Equipment Requirements. The inspection is formally recorded, signed by the inspector, and retained by the Swiftsure Inspection Team. Should a boat fail to comply with any item on the inspection list, this is recorded and referred to the PRO who will decide whether a protest action is to be initiated.

A post-race safety inspection is not done for the Swiftsure Inshore Race competitors but the NoR indicates they are subject to inspection, and this could be undertaken if the RO or PRO were to conclude that a boat appeared to be non-compliant with required safety requirements.

# **SAFETY EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS**

## **Background**

Swiftsure's Organizing Authority has designated the Three Long Courses a Category 3 under the World Sailing's Offshore Special Regulations (OSRs). The OA has modified some requirements which is published on the Swiftsure website under Race Info.

When determining what minimum safety equipment requirements will apply to the Three Long Courses and to the Swiftsure Inshore Race, it is understood that there is no absolute in safety and by the nature of the challenge of sailboat racing there is risk. The goal is to assess potential objective risks with the view of preparing response scenarios should they materialize and to reduce subjective risks, which are those mariners can control. The OA and PRO also play a role in reducing subjective risks.

Compliance with the OSRs is ultimately the responsibility of the Person in Charge of each competing boat. This includes secure storage of heavy items, strength of build of the boat, watertight integrity, hull and structure, the boat's safety equipment, crews' personal safety equipment, minimum gear, heavy weather sails, rigging, crew skills for emergency steering methods and COB procedures, and safety training.

The rules for the Three Long Courses identify prescribed circumstances where while on deck all crew must wear life jackets having lights, whistles, tethers, marine-grade retro-reflective material, and crotch/thigh straps. In addition, a clause in the Sailing Instructions encourages persons in charge to establish a safety protocol for their crew as to when PFDs are to be worn and tethers used to ensure safety, and it is recommended that Personal Flotation Devices be worn at all times, and that tethers be used when conditions warrant and definitely when winds are over 20 knots, seas over 3 feet, with diminished visibility (fog), or when sailing short-handed. It is recognized that requirements may vary depending on the type of boat being sailed. Crotch/thigh straps attached to PFDs are mandatory. This feature is vital in case a COB is/becomes unconscious or is being pulled out of the water via their inflated PFD (to avoid slipping out of it).

## **Three Long Courses**

The rationale for the Three Long Courses being designated as 'Category 3' is that they are "Races across open water, most of which is relatively protected or close to shorelines."

While a relative term, it is felt that rescue in the event of an emergency would be quickly available; i.e., within no more than one hour. Racers are in relatively close proximity to each other and would likely be the most immediate resource in the event of an incident involving one of the competing boats. Adjacent boats should become aware of such an emergency as they are required to monitor VHF 16 and DSC will be alerted in the event of activation by another competitor (racers are required to monitor VHF 16).

## **Swiftsure Inshore Race**

The race course is in the vicinity of Juan de Fuca Strait and the Victoria waterfront extending south to William Head east to Beaumont Shoal and north to D'Arcy Shoals, and crossing a finish line located in Cadboro Bay near the Royal Victoria Yacht Club. This is within the same area where the Royal Victoria Yacht Club's routine year-round long-distance races are sailed. Significantly more SAR resources are readily available for the Swiftsure Inshore Race than the long-distance races, should an incident occur. Participants must be complaint with the

responsible safety agency in the jurisdiction, in which the boat is registered (i.e. Transport Canada, US Coast Guard).

## **SEARCH AND RESCUE SUPPORT**

Enabling the Coast Guard to plan availability of Search and Rescue (SAR) resources during the Swiftsure International Yacht Race is accomplished by promoting excellent relationships and communications with the officer in charge and the supervisor of the JRCC Victoria who communicates with the Canadian Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Air Force 442 Squadron in planning SAR contingency plans, and with the US Coast Guard as the Canadian and US Coast Guards have interoperability arrangements (i.e., either US Coast Guard or Canadian Coast Guard SAR resources, or both agencies at the same time, may be tasked by the JRCC Victoria in the event of a SAR incident).

JRCC Victoria usually tasks the Royal Canadian Air Force to deploy one or two CH-149 Cormorant helicopters to the Victoria airport to be on standby during the Swiftsure Race. In coordination with JRCC Victoria, the Canadian Coast Guard deploys at least one vessel to the western part of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The Coast Guard also has a fast response vessel located in the Victoria Inner Harbour which can be tasked. The JRCC tasks the Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue Unit 33 (Oak Bay) and Unit 35 (Victoria) to provide safety support at the start of the Swiftsure race. Units 33 and 35 plus Unit 37 (Sooke) are also tasked to be on standby throughout the duration of the race in case of a SAR incident.

Swiftsure obtains a marine event permit from the US Coast Guard Sector Puget Sound. This also alerts the USCG about the timing and area covered by the Three Long Courses of the Swiftsure race.

## **SAFETY REVIEWS**

In an effort to encourage continuous improvement, the Organizing Authority ensures that a review of race safety is completed every year. When updating this policy and other applicable race documents, the Organizing Authority considers findings and recommendations from the review.

## **SUMMARY**

Racers in the Swiftsure International Yacht Race can encounter benign or challenging wind and tidal current conditions, and there are always risks such as commercial traffic and collisions among racers as well as COBs. Therefore, a focus on safety in the organization of the race and in the attitude of participating racers must be ever-present. This needs to continue to be reinforced to skippers at the Skippers' Meeting.

The Safety Equipment Requirements do not mitigate the responsibility of the Person in Charge to ensure that their boat is well prepared, well crewed, and sailed in a fashion that would be expected of highly competent mariners. The World Sailing Offshore Special Regulations are minimum requirements, and many Persons in Charge will choose to exceed the standards.

Excellent communications with the JRCC and other agencies is considered a key aspect of safety, and the advice and support of the JRCC is a necessary component of safety for the race.



# GLOSSARY

AIS – Automatic Identification System  
CCG – Canadian Coast Guard  
CMCC – Canadian Mission Control Centre  
DND – Department of National Defence  
DNS – Did Not Start (the race)  
DSC – Digital Selective Calling  
EC – Environment Canada  
EPIRB – Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon  
GMDSS – Global Maritime Distress and Safety System  
ISAF – International Sailing Federation, renamed “World Sailing”  
JRCC – Joint Rescue Coordination Centre Victoria (Pacific Region)  
MCTS – Marine Communications and Traffic Services (CCG)  
COB – Crew Overboard  
NOAA – National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (US)  
NoR – Notice of Race  
OA – Organizing Authority  
ONC – Ocean Network Canada (VENUS and NEPTUNE Canada cabled networks)  
ORC – Offshore Racing Council  
PFD – Personal Flotation Device  
PHRF – Pacific Handicap Racing Fleet  
PIC – Person in Charge (of a racing sailboat)  
PIYA – Pacific International Yachting Association  
PLB – Personal Locator Beacon  
PRO – Principal Race Officer  
RC – Race Committee  
RCAF – Royal Canadian Air Force  
RCC – Rescue Coordination Centre  
RCMSAR – Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue  
RCN – Royal Canadian Navy  
RO – Race Officer  
RRS – Racing Rules of Sailing (“Sail Canada”/International Sailing Federation)  
RVYC – Royal Victoria Yacht Club  
SAR – Search and Rescue  
SER – Safety Equipment Requirements  
SI – Sailing Instructions  
SOLAS – Safety of Life at Sea  
SRU – SAR Response Unit  
TC – Transport Canada  
USCG – United States Coast Guard  
USN – United States Navy  
VHF – Very High Frequency (radio)  
VTS – Vessel Traffic Service (Sector Puget Sound)  
VTS – Vessel Traffic Services (CCG)