

# SWIFTSURE INTERNATIONAL YACHT RACE

Hosted by the Royal Victoria Yacht Club

May 23-24, 2026

Victoria, British Columbia

## **VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

### **2026**

This Handbook provides an overview of the Swiftsure International Yacht Race along with information about the responsibilities of volunteers.

Further details on how to become a volunteer are provided at [swiftsure.org/volunteer/](https://swiftsure.org/volunteer/).

### ***Message from the Race Event Chair***

Thank you for volunteering with the 2026 Swiftsure International Yacht Race, the 81st. running of this race. We are looking forward to having you on our team. As a volunteer for Swiftsure, you will work with many dedicated and resourceful volunteers from the community or other sailing associations, as well as from the Royal Victoria Yacht Club. Your contribution is essential to the success of this completely volunteer-run event – we couldn't do it without you!

We believe that a clear understanding of the working relationship between volunteers, the Swiftsure Committee, and Royal Victoria Yacht Club will ensure we have a successful race event. This document has been developed to provide details about the responsibilities of the various volunteer roles, as well as the benefits of being a Swiftsure volunteer.

Thank you again for your support, we hope your experience is enjoyable and rewarding.

Sincerely,

Kirk Palmer  
Race Event Chair,  
Swiftsure International Yacht Race  
Royal Victoria Yacht Club

## ***Volunteers and Racers are Needed to Make the Race Successful***

The Swiftsure International Yacht Race is organized and hosted by the Royal Victoria Yacht Club and takes place each year in May on the weekend following the Victoria Day holiday in Canada. It consists of a number of races over various courses that start off Clover Point in Victoria on Saturday morning, May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Swiftsure relies completely on a group of dedicated and hardworking volunteers whose mission is to make the event an enjoyable and memorable experience for all race participants, their families, guests, and members of the public. We work hard to create a festive atmosphere to encourage community awareness and involvement.

### ***Swiftsure Volunteer Roles***

Many volunteers are involved in the running of the races. The majority of these individuals have experience in the various activities involved. These include starting and finishing the races, recording mark rounding times of competitors, engaging in communications with racers, inspecting boats to ensure safety requirements are met, and recording and finalizing the results.

Swiftsure requires additional volunteers who are involved in setting up and taking down the various event venues, docking yachts as they arrive for the race, greeting competitors and providing information, checking-in yacht skippers and giving them their skipper's packages, assisting with trophies and award ceremonies, assisting with crowd management at the Friday evening Dock Party, assisting with the post-race BBQ at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club for the Inshore Race, and organizing the Volunteer and Sponsors Appreciation and BBQ Evening.

If you volunteer 6 or more hours to the overall Swiftsure event, you will be considered a volunteer and will enjoy all the privileges and perks offered to event volunteers, including receiving a T-shirt. We welcome volunteers from the community and from other sailing associations. And if you're accompanying a sailor to Victoria, we'd welcome your involvement!

There is no requirement for volunteers to be members of the Royal Victoria Yacht Club other than for the key positions on the Swiftsure Committee.

## **Swiftsure Committee Organization**

The Swiftsure Committee is a program committee of the Royal Victoria Yacht Club. It is led by the Race Event Chair and is composed of members who oversee the various aspects of the event. In 2024, committee members include:

Race Event Chair: Kirk Palmer ([chair@swiftsure.org](mailto:chair@swiftsure.org))

Principle Race Officer: Dugald Smith ([pro@swiftsure.org](mailto:pro@swiftsure.org))

Race Director: John Comuzzi ([jcomuzzi@gmail.com](mailto:jcomuzzi@gmail.com))

Registrar: Leslie Basham ([registrar@swiftsure.org](mailto:registrar@swiftsure.org))

Logistics: Michael Koster ([logistics@swiftsure.org](mailto:logistics@swiftsure.org))

Sponsorship: Karen Palmer ([sponsor@swiftsure.org](mailto:sponsor@swiftsure.org))

Media Relations: Ed Watson ([edwatson@telus.net](mailto:edwatson@telus.net))

Technical Support: Alec Matthews ([alec@swiftsure.org](mailto:alec@swiftsure.org))

Volunteer Coordinator: Gillian Manson ([volunteer@swiftsure.org](mailto:volunteer@swiftsure.org))

Teams of volunteers deliver and support the range of tasks needed to ensure that the racers have a great experience. Each team has a team lead reporting to one of the members of the Swiftsure Committee.

- **Race Management:** This group is responsible for the actual running of the race, and is led by the Principal Race Officer with support from the Race Director. It includes:
  - The Start Line and Finish Line teams
  - Representatives on mark rounding boats.
  - Radio Communications team which provides radio email and text communication between competitors and race organizers prior to the start of the race.
  - Race Management also includes:
    - The Check-in team that confirms that registration requirements are fully met when competitors arrive, distributes skipper's packages, and confirms names and emergency contacts of crew on the Friday before the Race.
    - Check-in team also records the number of crew aboard and any changes in crew since check-in. Race Management members report on mark roundings during the race, where applicable, or when boats cross a Line of Longitude as specified in the Sailing Instructions.
    - The Inspection team, which inspects competitor vessels for compliance with safety requirements, and collects race card information after competitors finish the race.
    - Race Management coordinates with Swiftsure's myriad marine support organizations including the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre, Marine Communications and Traffic Services (safety radio communications, scheduled information to racers about commercial vessels, vessel traffic), Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue (Oak Bay, Victoria, and Sooke), and Royal Canadian Navy (which provides the Anson Street location for race finish crew).

- **Registration:** This group consists of the Registrar and Assistant Registrar who ensure that all boats registering for the event meet requirements and pay the required fees prior to the event. In addition, they also support the Check-in team in preparing skippers' packages on the day prior to the race.
  
- **Logistics:** This group is made up a number of teams:
  - Set-up and take down of signage and equipment at most of the event venues
  - Organization, rental of materials, and delivery of supplies to many of the venues.
  - Run a number of event operations including assistance in docking, welcoming of competitors, and crewing an information booth near the Check-in site to provide information to both competitors and the public.
  - Providing a bowl of soup to racers at the Inspection Dock after they finish their race.
  - Pre-arranging with various organizations for event and site permits. xxx
  
- **Technology:** This group is responsible for delivering all the IT requirements of the event including YB Tracking, online registration set-up, and results.
  
- **Sponsorship:** This team is responsible for recruiting and working with event sponsors before, during, and after the event.
  
- **Media & Public Relations:** This team is responsible for all media communications and publicity arrangements including ads in sailing-related magazines, generation of articles for the media, creating interview opportunities for media with the Chair and other "official" spokespersons for Swiftsure, promotion of social media, updating Swiftsure's website information, and photographic coverage of the races.
  
- **Trophies and Awards:** This team is responsible for perpetual and keeper trophies and pennants, organization of the awards presentations, as well as the maintenance of race result records.
  
- **Entertainment:** This group is responsible for the organization and management of parties and social events including the pre-race dock party.
  
- **Volunteer Coordination:** This group is responsible for assisting team leads in recruiting volunteers, provision of T-shirts to volunteers, supporting all the volunteers who make the event possible, and coordinating the Volunteer and Sponsor recognition BBQ at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club after the race event.

## **Orientation**

Orientation for each team will be held by the team leaders in May ahead of the Swiftsure Race to outline duties and coordinate shifts to be worked. Wherever possible, new volunteers will be assigned to work with an experienced volunteer on a "buddy system".

## ***Volunteer Appreciation***

In addition to being part of a remarkable yachting and community event, volunteers receive the following privileges and perks in appreciation for their important role:

- A souvenir Swiftsure T-shirt
- Invitation to the Volunteer and Sponsors Appreciation BBQ at Royal Victoria Yacht Club
- Opportunity to enjoy beverages with the racers at the Friday dock party and Inshore Race Event at RVYC (when not on duty)

## ***Swiftsure Activities***

Some volunteers are busy in the months prior to the Swiftsure event in organizing everything from registration to marketing and race details. Others are most active in the days leading up to and during the actual event, supporting all the activities noted below. There are diverse and important tasks that come together to make Swiftsure a great experience for the racers and the community. Note that specific times for many activities are set by the team lead closer to the event:

### **Wednesday May 20**

- Some boats arrive at RVYC en route from the Round Saltspring Race. Docking is assisted by a team of experienced volunteers.
- Boats start arriving at the Causeway in front of the Empress Hotel, and at Ship Point in the Inner Harbour and are met and assisted by volunteer docking crews. They also provide each boat with information including locations of the Check-in and the Skippers' meeting.
- International arriving boats are guided by a volunteer-crewed RHIB to the Customs clearance dock and advised where to then proceed for docking. The RHIB volunteers advise Canadian boats where to directly proceed for moorage.
- Set-up volunteers hang event and sponsor banners, docking signage, signal flags and erect a flagpole on the Causeway dock.

### **Thursday May 21**

- A Race Committee command boat is stationed at the Causeway or Ship Point dock (and remains until Monday at 1100)
- Arrival of boats participating in a race to the Inner Harbour (if one is held)
- Arrival of boats at the Inner Harbour continues and, beginning at 0730, boats are met and assisted with docking by volunteers. They also provide each boat with information including location of Check-in and the Skippers' meeting.
- Logistics reserves docking space at the Inspection Dock for the Start Boat and other boats involved in the start.
- An information booth is set up on the Causeway float and crewed by volunteer ambassadors.
- Check in and registration is available from 1200hrs to 1800 hrs.
- RVYC Foreshore staff set up a tent(s) at the finish line on McLoughlin Point on Anson Street located at the Royal Canadian Navy property. The finish line lead and other volunteers participate in the setup of the finish line site.
- The command centre boat arrives on Thursday and docks at the Inspection Dock.

## **Friday May 22**

- Docking continues with a number of boats arriving after an overnight sail. Beginning 0730 boats are met by volunteers, who help them to dock and provide them with information including location of Check-in and the Skippers' meeting.
- Check-in opens at 1000 and closes at 1800hrs.
- Volunteer ambassadors are at the information booth 0800-1900.
- Completion of final details of the setup at McLoughlin Point and the finish line on Anson Street on the Royal Canadian Navy property.
- Awards ceremony for 2025 winners, held at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club, starts at 1400, followed by a Technical Presentation and the Skippers' Meeting.
- Between 1900 and 2200 there is a Dock party for the racers, sponsors, and invited guests on the Causeway float. Volunteers are involved in crowd management and assisting the band in moving equipment down and up the Causeway ramp. Volunteers not on duty may also participate in the event.

## **Saturday May 23**

- Mark boat volunteers board mark vessels and proceed to marks.
- Start boat volunteers and invited guests board start vessel and disembark after all races have started.
- Safety boat representatives board safety boats; a volunteer is assigned to each safety boat during the starts.
- The team of photographers board their assigned boats.
- Clover Point set-up volunteers arrive at 0700 and pack-up after all activities are concluded. During the event they assist with crowd management.
- Volunteer crew arrive at Clover Point and set up the start line pin; the race start is between the pin end mark and the start boat mark on the water.
- Media relations and volunteer announcers arrive at Clover Point no later than 0830.
- Beginning at 0900 Swiftsure races start off Clover Point at 10-minute intervals.
- Finish line volunteers set up in Cadboro Bay for the Inshore Race.
- Docking crew volunteers for the Inshore Race arrive at RVYC and stay until the last boats have finished and docked.
- At 1730 the Inshore Race Prize giving and BBQ are held at RVYC.
- At 1800 the finish line volunteers arrive at McLoughlin Point and the finish line is crewed continuously until the last boat finishes or until 0800 on Monday, May 25.
- At 1800 the Inspection team volunteers set up at the Inspection Dock, and maintain this station continuously until arrival at inspection of the last boat to finish within the time limit for the race.
- At 1800 Soup Server volunteers set up on the Causeway floating dock and maintain this service continuously until the last boat finishes or until no boat will finish by 2400 on Sunday, May 25.

## **Sunday May 24**

- Mark boats start returning when all boats have rounded or by 1400 when the time limits have expired.
- Most non-RVYC Inshore racers leave RVYC or the Inner Harbour for home.
- Finish line, Inspection and Soup Serving volunteers reduce to minimal crews (2 each) by 2000.
- Race activities cease either when the last boat has finished and cleared Inspections or at 0800 Monday when the race time limit expires

## **Monday May 25**

- Operations are shut down.
- Take-down volunteers and RVYC Foreshore staff remove all signage, trailers, tents and committee boats from the Inner Harbour by 1100.
- Finish line tent(s) and equipment are removed and packed in an orderly manner.

## ***Volunteer & Sponsors Appreciation BBQ – early June***

- Volunteer and Sponsors Appreciation BBQ begins at 1730 – complimentary food and a beverage for a job well done!

## ***Communications:***

### **Volunteers and the Media:**

Inquiries from the media should be directed to Ed Watson, Media Relations Coordinator who will respond or arrange for an interview with the Race Event Chair (Kirk Palmer), Principal Race Officer (Dugald Smith), a person in charge of a race boat, or other appropriate spokesperson as designated.

As a volunteer, you may be asked a number of questions by a variety of people, including members of the media. Please be a good ambassador and be as helpful as possible. Should the media ask you a question while on duty, it is important to know what you may and may not say. Here are some guidelines:

- **What you may talk to the media about:**
  - Why you volunteered and the role you play as a volunteer
  - Your enjoyment of the event
  - Any practical information about the event such as when and where the races start
- **What you should *NOT* talk to the media about:**
  - Financial arrangements between the event and sponsors
  - Personal information about participants, volunteers, and/or Swiftsure Committee members
  - Security or emergency issues
  - Noise or crowd issues
  - Incidents involving race boats, participants, visitors, families of our racers, or volunteers
  - The race itself or other aspects of the event for which you do not have detailed or accurate information

**Confidentiality:** As a volunteer, you may have access to some personal information of the race participants, committee members, or other volunteers. If someone asks you for that information, it is important to remember that information of this nature is private and/or confidential. Always be helpful and understanding while explaining why you cannot give out such information. If you sense it is important for the inquirer to contact someone, you can indicate that you will pass on their contact information to the person in question.

**Incident Reporting:** Emergency incidents such as fire or injury should be reported by calling 911, and immediately thereafter by contacting a shift team leader, the Swiftsure ambassador, or a member of the Swiftsure Committee.

Other unusual or troubling situations or incidents should be immediately reported to a shift team leader, the Swiftsure ambassador, or a member of the Swiftsure Committee. Incidents of a less serious nature should also be reported in a timely fashion.

Volunteers should also familiarize themselves with the following Safety Plan which details action to be taken in various types of emergencies.

## **Safety Plan**

We are committed to running a race that is safe for all involved. Please be sure to review the safety standards and provisions described below.

### **Safety Issues Addressed in Plan**

- Fire
- Person Overboard
- Pollution Spill
- Injury

#### **Fire**

##### **Action by Discoverer:**

- Shout "fire, fire, fire"
- Use fire extinguisher if possible (see Site Plan for locations)
- Evacuate all personnel to Muster Point (see Site Plan for location)
- Call 911 and report location of fire (Causeway Docks or Ship Point Jetty)
- Standby to direct Fire Department to scene on arrival

##### **Action by Onsite Duty Logistics Head**

*Confirm that Fire Department has been called*

- Call GVHA at 250-383-8326 (marina office) or 250-383-8300 (corporate office).
- Advise Media Relations Coordinator and, if not available, call the Race Event Chair
- Standby to assist Fire Department as necessary

#### **Person Overboard**

##### **Action by Discoverer:**

Shout "man (or "person") overboard"  
Keep eyes on person in water  
Attract attention of bystanders  
Throw life-saving device if available (see Site Plan for locations)  
Call or have bystander call 911 to report person overboard and position

**Action by Onsite Duty Logistics Head:**

Call GVHA at 250-383-8326 or 250-383-8300

Obtain volunteer assistance

Advise Media Relations Co-ordinator

**Pollution Spill**

**Action by Discoverer:**

Inform Duty Logistics Head

Stop source of spill if possible

Remain on scene to render assistance as required

**Action by Duty Logistics Head:**

Call GVHA at 250-383-8300 or 250-383-8326

Obtain volunteer assistance

Deploy Spill kit as necessary or

Contact Volunteers on RVYC RHIB to assist in deploying spill kit

Inform Logistics Head

**Injury**

**Action by Discoverer:**

Render assistance within limits of medical training

Call for first aid (see kit location on Site Plan)

Seek assistance of qualified bystander

If considered serious or life threatening call 911 for ambulance

**Action by Duty Logistics Head**

Call 911 for ambulance if necessary

Inform Media Relations Coordinator

## **Contacts**

Emergency	911 (phone) VHF 16 (Mayday)
GVHA Office	250-383-8300
GVHA Moorage	250-383-8326
Portable Toilet Service (Coast Environmental)	250-380-1166
Transport Canada Harbour Master Office	250-363-3578 or VHF Channel 18A
Transport Canada Harbour Master – Emergency Number	250-380-8177 (mobile)
Victoria Harbour Flight Advisory	Contact Transport Canada Harbour Master

## **Environmental Goals**

Swiftsure Volunteers are asked to make all reasonable efforts to ensure the event is conducted in a safe, clean, and environmentally sound manner.

## **Parking**

You will need to make your own way to the site where you will be performing your volunteer role. Check if parking has been prearranged by the event coordinator; otherwise, you are responsible for your parking fees. Travelling by bicycle or public transportation is recommended and contributes to Swiftsure's environmental goals.

## **Refreshments**

Volunteers are responsible for any snacks or meals they may wish to eat while on duty. In some cases, your duty Team Leader for the shift may have organized some refreshments during late night shifts.

## **General Information on the Swiftsure International Yacht Race**

The more you know about Swiftsure, the more you'll enjoy your volunteer role! Here is some general information that may be useful. For a comprehensive overview of the Swiftsure International Yacht Race, please visit the website at [swiftsure.org](https://www.swiftsure.org).

### **Four Races:**

**These are shown on the map below with corresponding line colours.**

- **Swiftsure Lightship Classic** (black) to Swiftsure Bank in the Pacific Ocean and back to Victoria. Open to monohull boats with Pacific Handicap Racing Fleet (PHRF) rating of 129 or lower (138.2 nautical miles (nm))
- **Cape Flattery Race** (blue) to Neah Bay near the Strait of Juan de Fuca western entrance and back to Victoria. Open to monohull and multihull boats with an ORC or PHRF rating (101.9 nm)
- **Juan de Fuca Races** (yellow) to Clallam Bay on the US side of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and back to Victoria. Open to monohull boats with a PHRF rating of 100 or slower, and to multihull boats with a PHRF rating. (75.2 nm)
- **The Inshore Race** course set on race day, depending on weather predictions and tidal currents, in the vicinity of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the Victoria waterfront, Trial Island and in the vicinity of Haro Strait finishing in Cadboro Bay near R

**Participation:** Swiftsure competitors come from all over the Pacific Northwest and as far away as California. You'll see that all sailboats that have registered for the race are identified on the website under Registration, Registered Yachts <https://www.swiftsure.org/registered-yachts/> and, for most, there is background information about the boat, the race it's entered in, its crew, and even a photo. Also, there are interesting photos under the [Photos & Videos drop-down menu](#) plus many stories on the website home page under [News](#).

**Brief History of Swiftsure:** The first recorded sailboat racing in the Victoria area was in the late 1850's between boats of the Royal Navy and the early colonists. Interest in the sport grew in the following decades and, by 1930, a long-distance race from Cadboro Bay around the Lightship on Swiftsure Bank, at the entrance to the Juan de Fuca Strait, was organized. There were six entrants from yacht clubs in Victoria, Vancouver and Seattle. By 1960, forty-five boats were entered in this now-classic race. In the following year the Swiftsure Lightship, which was an anchored boat marking the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, was removed from service, because navigation systems on commercial vessels entering and leaving the strait had advanced to enable safer passages. After the Swiftsure Lightship was removed, race yachts in the Swiftsure Lightship Classic rounded a Royal Canadian Navy vessel temporarily anchored on station at the same location.

In 1962, after considerable grumbling by skippers of boats too small to go to "the Bank", the Royal Victoria Yacht Club introduced the shorter Juan de Fuca race to Clallam Bay, some fifteen miles west of Port Angeles. Like the granddaddy Classic, it started with modest beginnings. In the first year of the Juan de Fuca race, there were only four entries; by 1969 this had risen to forty-nine boats.

With increased participation, and faced with only two courses, one of 138.2 miles and the other of only 78.7 (now 75.2) nautical miles, the race organizers and many skippers found themselves in a dilemma: many boats wanted a more challenging overnight race although they didn't want to go all the way to the Bank. The solution was the introduction in 1988 of the Cape Flattery race to Neah Bay, 101.9 nautical miles in length, halfway between the Swiftsure Bank and the Clallam Bay courses. This has proved to be very popular and attracts larger boats.

For boats wishing to participate in a day race, the Swiftsure Inshore Race was established in the early 2000's. This race is the last start and boats compete off the Victoria waterfront, finishing at Cadboro Bay where they down sails, proceed to the Royal Victoria Yacht Club, and participate in a social event including the BBQ and awards ceremony.

The community of Victoria has embraced Swiftsure. In the post-war years, the Swiftsure Committee negotiated the use of Eaton's (the largest local department store of the day) display window at the corner of Douglas & View in downtown Victoria to serve as the Swiftsure headquarters. A large map of the racecourse was installed, and race progress was shown by moving miniature boats across the map grids. As the numbers of yachts increased, this became a daunting task. Nonetheless, the event, and this way of graphically displaying progress, was much appreciated by Victorians. As one observer said, "People used to line the sidewalks, sit on the curbs. There was a feeling of excitement right there, in the middle of town."

For over 70 years, the community followed the race on the radio. Humphrey Golby served as the Voice of Swiftsure from the first broadcast when "Dose crazy yotsmen" competed with the fisherman's band to reach the outside world during the 1952 race. Radio station CKDA pioneered with the limited ship-to-shore equipment of the day and "The Voice was born". When L'Apache's (later Diamond Head) broke her backstay, the whole community followed the excitement. Swiftsure coverage expanded when Harold Elworthy's Island Tug and Barge Company generously provided tugboats for the press.

Technology has offered better ways of sharing the race with landlubbers. The Race Tracker on the swiftsure.org website can be accessed from the comforts of home while the racers are dealing with whatever wind, sea states, and weather conditions that prevail.

For more details on the biggest yacht race on the Pacific Coast, refer to *Swiftsure: The First Fifty Years*, by Humphrey Golby and Shirley Hewitt, 1980 (no longer in print but available in libraries).

Swiftsure...

## **Always A Challenge**