

MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM WIND CONDITIONS - SURVIVAL vs COMPETITIVE SAILING

Often one of the most difficult decisions for a race officer is how much wind should the competitors be expected to race in. When are they kept ashore, when can they be sent out.

Most International One Design Classes have maximum and minimum wind conditions for competition, however these are designed for the experienced and though they take into consideration the type of boat, keel, multihull or high performance, there is seldom consideration for the age of the athlete.

BC Sailing is concerned about enthusiastic race officers applying these maximum wind limits to the in-experienced and in particular to youths.

The following is a guideline for race officers within BC

Minimum Wind Conditions.

Minimum wind conditions are normally concerned with the fairness of a race rather than the safety of a race.

In the past the majority of classes had a minimum wind velocity of 5 knots at all marks as the standard for starting races.

In 2008 this was changed because of the notoriously light air in Qingdao at the Olympics. The guideline we adopted there was:

" There is no minimum wind velocity, rather we will race in any wind, that in the opinion of the race officer, can produce competitive fair sailing"

This is a good policy particularly in light air and moving water. It does however require race officers to modify their thinking regarding how light can it be to start a race.

If all boats are sailing, rather than drifting it is possible to start a race.

When making this decision always consider that for races in progress, you can always abandon the race if the conditions are influencing the *fairness of the race*, do not be shy in doing so.

Normally light air is not a safety issue, the exception being if boats are being swept away by the current.

Never run a race in light or heavy air if you do not have the support boats available to initiate your safety plan.

A minimum of 3 support boats should always be available for any organized event.

Maximum wind Conditions.

Reliable wind measuring devices should be used. It is interesting to note how wrong persons are in measuring the wind without the proper equipment. Often they will assume the wind is much stronger than it usually is, which is good.

There is a popular poster in international sailing that shows very strong winds / seas, It has the caption, "in 35 knots you don't need a life jacket, you need a priest"
25 knots of wind is a lot of wind particularly if it has had an opportunity to build big seas. 25 knots of wind in relatively flat water is a piece of cake to the experienced, and actually a lot of fun.

There is a major difference in buoy racing small boats vs boats 40 ft plus in length that are being raced in Med or Long Distance races by experienced crews. More on distance racing at the end of this paper.

Consult the recommendations of the various one design classes that you normally come in contact with. Be aware that their guidelines are geared to the equipment and make the assumption that the competitors are seasoned athletes, experienced in heavy wind. For weekend or week day events with a mixed bag of experience and age it is best to error on the side of safety.

For total youth events, the race officer should:

- Consult with coaches
- Consider the experience of the youths
- Check the class rules
- Review the safety plan
- Review your safety personnel and equipment (support boats)

Don't send anyone out if you have limited rescue capability.

For championships it is normal to sail in Class maximum wind conditions, however big seas are as big a problem as the winds that produce them.

Consider wave height and length. Big swells/waves particularly breakers should always be avoided for smaller boats.

Twenty knots, steady in flat water is safer, easier to sail in and control than 15 knots in big waves with gusts.

For example the International Star Class has a maximum wind condition of 25 knots, however, 18 knots in big waves is the maximum these boats should be sailed in.

If, for the first race the wind is moderate and slowly builds during the day, the comfort factor is much higher for the inexperienced and youths. It affords an opportunity for these folks to gain big air experience.

On the other hand, if the wind is strong at the onset, the opportunity to gradually become accustomed to heavier air is lost and can be intimidating.

With building winds it is essential that the wave conditions and wind strength are closely monitored and that races in progress approaching the class wind limits be considered for abandonment or not started.

The ability of the race committee to respond to safety issues is another governing factor. If you have lots of coaches, support boats, and a safety officer, higher winds bigger seas are possible, however if your ability to rescue is limited, best to keep everyone on the shore.

Incidentally the best rescue teams are the Coaches.

Breezes and currents which can move capsized boats out of the racing area should be avoided.

In Youth racing, consider that they are often not experienced, often quite smaller than adults and normally much lighter in weight. They are usually not as strong or conditioned as an adult.

With youths it is common for a percentage of the fleet to still be learning the sport. Nothing will dull their enthusiasm quicker than being overwhelmed by big air, big seas. . Again, big seas are as big a problem as the winds that produce them.

The decision to send the fleet out should be made as a result of conditions in the racing area vs conditions at the Club house. If there is doubt have a support boat in the racing area measuring the actual wind. Additionally consult weather channels, the local airport, Coast Guard and any shipping in the area.

Medium and Long Distance racing

Med and LD races are often difficult to judge in that the conditions at the start may be acceptable but may dramatically change during the course of the race.

The race should not be started in over 25 knots if conditions are expected to increase and there are storm warnings.

Once started the RC must be able to monitor conditions over the entire course of the race and have a working safety plan in hand. This plan should take into consideration the ability to rescue in very adverse conditions.

Consult with the Coast Guard regarding their ability to assist should problems occur.

In races like the Van Isle 360. a safety plan is developed with the Coast Guard, months in advance of the event. For this event and the Swiftsure Classic, a grid system is used to identify locations.

Communications is a major factor and in addition to radio, cell phones, EPIRB and Transponders are often required.

For Med and long distance races in open seas, classifications of safety equipment, as well as crew requirements are defined via the PIYA Safety Standards Certificate, and Safety Categories.

Safety conditions are based on the venue, format and listed in the Notice Of Race.

The name of the sport is Sailing, not Survival