

CODE OF CONDUCT & ADVICE

FOR

CROSS SOLENT SWIMMERS

This document was prepared and approved by:

**HM Coastguard
Queen's Harbour Master Portsmouth
Southampton VTS
Solent Sea Rescue Organisation
Ryde Inshore Rescue**

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SO YOU WANT TO SWIM THE SOLENT

Swimming across the Solent is not just another open water swim and should not be undertaken without considerable preparation. Whilst not as difficult as swimming across English Channel, the cross Solent swimmer has to cross at least one busy shipping lane, negotiate around ferries and hovercraft travelling to and from the Island and avoid all the many pleasure boats using the Solent. The currents produced by the tides are strong and complex and cannot be ignored

This Code of Conduct and associated guidelines was first drafted in 1990; in this latest edition advice has been added to aid would be swimmers on routes to take and other navigational aspects The code has been prepared to assist charity and non-professional swimmers in their attempt to swim the Solent principally on the Ryde – Portsmouth, or Ryde – Gosport routes. It should be read in conjunction with current Notice to Mariners and Standing Instructions applicable to the Ports of Portsmouth & Southampton.

The “Port Marine Safety Code” was published by the government in March 2002 and details formal procedures that have to be undertaken as part of the SMS (Safety Management System) before a person can engage in a cross Solent Swim.

“As an integral part of the Port Marine safety Code, and in keeping with the SMS, Organisers of recreational events planned to take place within the Dockyard Port of Portsmouth have responsibilities for the safety of their event.”

These include the undertaking of a Risk Assessment as part of the planning of the event; “Guidance Notes on Risk Assessments for Events in Harbour Authority Areas” is available from the Royal Yachting Association (www.rya.org.uk/legal). Once complete a copy of the Risk Assessment shall be posted to the Queens Harbours Masters Office, Portsmouth Naval Base, Portsmouth.

Notifying the Authorities:

Before any swim can be undertaken the shipping control authorities that are responsible for safety or control the passage of commercial vessels through the Solent need to be informed, these are:

Queen’s Harbour Master, Portsmouth (QHM):

Queen’s Harbour Manager

Semaphore Tower

HM Naval Base

Portsmouth

Hants

PO1 3DT

Tel General Enquiries: 02392 723344 or Operations only 02392 723694

E-mail: DESNBCP-COB-AQHM@mod.uk

Southampton Port Control (VTS):

Vessel Traffic Services Centre
Associated British Ports
37 Berth Eastern Docks
Southampton
Hants
SO1 1GG
Tel: 02380 608208
E-mail: southamptonvts@abports.co.uk or RBlair@abports.co.uk

In addition the organisation responsible for initiation and coordination of civil maritime search and rescue in the Solent area:

HM Coastguard – Solent:

HM Coastguard
44a Marine Parade West
Lee-on-the-Solent
Hants
PO13 9NR
Tel: 02392 552100
E-mail: WM.Solent@mcga.gov.uk

It is incumbent on the swim organiser to notify, in writing, to these authorities at least 14 days ahead of the event, that a swim is planned. These authorities need to know:

1. The date and time of the swim with alternative dates if known.
2. The planned start and finish points of the swim
2. The name and postal address of the swim organiser, complete with telephone numbers for home and office hours.
3. The name, size and description of the main safety launch, complete with VHF radio call sign and/or mobile phone number.(*)
4. The names, size, description and VHF radio call sign and/or mobile phone number of any other escort or nanny craft .(*)
5. Details of other safety cover.
6. A Risk Assessment has been undertaken and written up and a copy sent to QHM Portsmouth.
7. The number of swimmers in a group.

Guidance Note:

There should be no more than 12 swimmers in one escort group, with no more than two groups attempting the crossing at any one time. This group rating attempts to ensure that the swimmers would remain grouped together whilst crossing the shipping channels.

Safety Cover:

Each and every swimmer shall have an individual safety escort craft.

Guidance Note:

This may be a kayak or canoe provided they too are escorted by larger safety, escort or "Nanny Boats".

To assist in the event of a safety emergency occurring, the following information should be recorded and kept with the Organiser and ashore with a competent person whose contact details are known to the authorities and who will be available for consultation during the swim. This information could be relayed by e-mail to HM Coastguard on the day of the swim:

1. The name of each swimmer complete with a description of dress to be worn e.g. costume, wetsuit etc, plus next of kin contact information.
2. The fullest possible description of each support vessel and kayak/canoe, including type, length, colour etc
3. The names and contact details of next of kin of each person in the support boats and which boat they are expected to be in
4. The marina, mooring or launch point from which the escort party and local organiser will leave and return on the day.
5. The name, address and telephone number of a contact point ashore from which complete and accurate details of the event could be obtained while the swim is in progress.

Support or Escort Craft:

Requirement:

It is a requirement that during each swim at least one powered safety launch is in attendance. They shall have the combined capability to safely recover from the water **all** swimmers and **all** additional small attendant swimmer safety craft e.g. canoeists and their canoes **at the same time** if so required.

Guidance Note:

As powered craft will normally have exposed propellers that could injure a swimmer it has become normal practice for a competent canoeist to accompany each swimmer. This canoeist provides local support and cover for the swimmer allowing the power craft to stand off at a safe distance and if necessary warn other craft to keep clear. The other advantage of canoeists in close support is that the swimmer is not subjected to exhaust fumes from the power craft. Since the horizon of the swimmer is very limited the canoeist should lead the swimmer and not the other way around

For events that will involve a large number of swimmers additional ‘nanny’ craft should be in attendance. These craft should be such that they can permit a swimmer to get changed into warm clothing and to have a method of providing them with protection from the elements.

The Risk Assessment with Normal Operating Procedure & its associated Emergency Action plan must address the action to be taken if a swimmer fails to complete the crossing and has to be removed from the water and other foreseeable incidents.

Communications and signals:

During the period of the swim the international flag signal “A” shall be displayed indicating a swimmer is in the water. **This flag/board shall only be displayed when a swimmer is in the water!**

The safety craft shall have a means of communicating with the shore and preferably other vessels. This should take the form of a Marine Band VHF radio which has at least the following channels fitted: 16, 67, 11, 12, 6, 10 or a mobile phone if no VHF radio is carried.

It should be noted that as VHF radio channels 11 and 12 are used to co-ordinate the movement of large vessels within the Solent, radio communications on these channels should be brief and concise.

On the day notifications:

Having obtained a local weather forecast for the day and assessed the viability of the swim, the authorities must be notified by phone of the organiser’s intentions for that day.

All the authorities should be given the following information:

1. Name of the swim organiser, complete with telephone number.
2. Number of swimmers, number of canoeists if any and total number of persons taking part in the event.
3. Planned start and finish points complete with start time and estimated finish time.
4. Method of communications being used complete with call signs/mobile telephone numbers etc.
5. Name of a contact point ashore from whom full details of the event could be obtained should communications with the group be lost.

It should be noted that the authorities must be notified even if the swim is cancelled or postponed for whatever reason.

Passage to start position:

HM Coastguard, radio call sign “SOLENT COASTGUARD” should be notified on VHF channel 67 of the passage of the craft to the start point and its intentions.

This call proves the safety craft's communications system is functional to Coastguard. If no VHF is carried, telephone Solent Coastguard on 02392 552100.

Pre Start Communications:

Once on scene at the start point, a few minutes before the swimmers enter the water notify the following stations on VHF or by telephone.

Southampton VTS	VHF channel 12 or telephone	02380 608208
QHM Portsmouth	VHF channel 11 or telephone	02392 723694
Solent Coastguard	VHF channel 67 or telephone	02392 552100

The harbour authorities will notify you of the position and passage of large ships, they will also advise these craft of your status.

Note, do not expect these craft to give way to you, you are expected to adjust your passage so that the deep draught commercial vessels, warships etc, operating in marked channels are not impeded.

During the Swim:

The same authorities are to be notified at the following positions:

- When the swimmers start e.g. enter the water at Ryde
- Just before the swimmer enters any main shipping channel e.g. at North Sturbridge or Portsmouth Bar channel
- As the last swimmer leaves the main shipping channel
- When the last swimmer is clear of the water and the event is finished.

Further communications should be made to HM Coastguard if a swimmer is removed from the water during the race and requires medical assistance.

HM Coastguard should be immediately notified when the safety craft has cause for concern for the safety of those in his charge.

After the Swim:

HM Coastguard should be notified when all safety launches and associated craft are safe and secure at their destination.

Official Accreditation of the Swim:

If the swim attempt is to be recorded it must be timed and witnessed by an official approved by the Solent Swimming Association. For the swim to be recognised by them the timing of the swim must start and finish when the swimmer is on land 10 metres from the waters edge.

ADVICE TO SWIMMERS

Possible Swims:

The traditional cross Solent swim in the eastern Solent is from Ryde sands to Southsea war memorial and to minimise the effect of currents is usually started at low water Portsmouth. At this time the sand is exposed at Ryde to the end of the Pier and beyond to the east of it. The distance to Southsea at this time starting at the waters edge is approximately 3 ¼ miles. The fastest time for the swim ever recorded is about 1 hr 10 mins. But most competent swimmers will achieve it sometime between 1 ½ hrs to 2 hrs provided they have a good pilot. As a guide the swim time will be close to that achieved for a 5 km swim in the pool.

The reverse swim from Southsea (Clarence Pier) to Ryde sands is much harder because of adverse currents whatever time the swim is contemplated. Times for this swim are usually 30 - 45 mins. Longer than for the Ryde Southsea swim. If a double crossing is the goal, normally the start is from Southsea timing the swim to arrive at Ryde about an hour before low water and making the return as soon as possible.

On both of these swims the Southampton shipping channel has to be crossed as well as the Bar channel at the entrance of Portsmouth harbour.

The shortest and easiest crossing in the eastern Solent is from Fort Gilkicker at Gosport to Ryde sands a distance of 2 ½ miles.

In the central Solent the tides are very complex and cross Solent swims in this area are very rarely undertaken. In the western Solent the only practical cross Solent swim is from Hurst Castle to Colwell bay on the Island. Here the distance is only just over a mile but the tide is critical with only about a 30 min stand of when the current is sufficiently low to allow the swim. Consulting a reliable tide chart is a must if this swim is contemplated.

Preparations:

A 3-4 mile sea swim is no mean achievement and for most swimmers demands some training. For stamina at least one 5 km swim in the pool should be accomplished as part of the preparations for the swim. The average sea temperature in the Solent in July and August is 18 deg C; ten degrees colder than most indoor swimming pools. To acclimatise to this and the choppy conditions of the sea, some sea swimming of at least a mile should be undertaken.

Except for a smear of vasiline under the armpits to avoid chaffing, few swimmers these days bother to grease up for a Solent swim. Some do prefer to wear a body suit or even a lightweight wet suit but the choice is best made during the training swims

Navigation:

For all swims reference to a chart of the Solent and the Solent Tide Charts is strongly recommended. For the traditional Ryde to Southsea swim starting at low water, the current is eastwards down the Solent towards the forts. To combat this, the start of the swim should be about 600 m east of Ryde Pier and begin with a heading to Stokes Bay using the church just west of Fort Gilkicker as an aiming point i.e. due North (true). If this heading is maintained the course should take the swimmer close to the North Sturbridge buoy which is approximately 1 mile into the swim, and then to Southsea. Avoid the temptation to swim directly towards the Southsea war memorial until the Portsmouth Bar channel is reached. On this course the swim will get close to the Isle of Wight ferries in the Swashway on the approach to Southsea. They are in a restricted channel and must be given room to manoeuvre so keep to the east of the Swashway line and cross the Bar channel just west of number 2 Bar Buoy. Avoid the wooden breakwater complex below the war memorial on landing.

The start of the Swim from Southsea to Ryde normally starts to the west side of Clarence Pier and after crossing the Bar channel running parallel to the shore on the Gosport side until level with Fort Gilkicker. At 3 hrs before high water the current, although slight is in the direction of the swim. On reaching Fort Gilkicker head towards the tall church spire (Ryde Parish Church) just to the west of Ryde Pier. Maintain this heading until level with the North Sturbridge buoy which will be on the left hand side and then head for the Hovertravel terminal just to the east of Ryde pier. Avoid fighting the current over the last ¼ mile and land on Ryde sands.

The swim from Fort Gilkicker to Ryde Sands should start at about 2 hours before low water and follow the same course as above. On both of these swims avoid landing at Ryde Pier. The sand is firm on either side of the pier but avoid being forced too far to the west of the pier as from about 200 m west the sand becomes mixed with blue slipper (a wet sticky clay) which is very difficult to walk on especially after a gruelling swim!!!

Weather:

The wind and visibility are the main criteria governing whether a swim can take place although it might be unwise to set off if the forecast is for thunderstorms. The limiting wind condition depends on the ability of the swimmer and their experience. As a general rule the accepted limit is force 4 which is the onset of white horses on the water. The direction of the wind also plays a part and the swim becomes more difficult if the winds, and the waves, are in the face of the swimmer. Regarding visibility do not start the swim if land on the opposite side of the Solent cannot be seen or if the forecast is for deteriorating visibility. On no account attempt to make the swim during the hours of darkness

As mentioned earlier the average sea temperature in the Solent is 18 deg C in July and August and this is when most swims are undertaken. In May and June the air temperature might be higher but the sea is still warming up. Not a problem for a short dip but might cause hypothermia on a long swim.

Dependent on the kind of summer, the sea temperature does not drop by much in early September but by mid September we are approaching the equinox when storms might be expected so this generally rules out any swims for the remainder of the year.

Glossary of Terms:

Nanny Boat:	Yacht or Motor Cruiser that often carries the swimmers clothes and can provide warmth & protection to swimmers failing to complete the swim.
Escort Boat:	Small, often open, powered craft that can manoeuvre easily to pick up swimmers
LNTM	Local Notice to Mariners
SMS	Safety Management System
RA	Risk Assessment
NOP	Normal Operating Procedure
EAP	Emergency Action Plan.
PMSC	Port Marine Safety Code.
QHM	Queens Harbour Master Portsmouth
VTS	Vessel Traffic Scheme (<i>Southampton Port Control</i>)

This **Code of Conduct** was prepared in conjunction with:

HM Coastguard, Solent MRCC, 44a Marine Parade West, Lee-on-the-Solent, PO13 9NR
– Tel: 02392 552100

Queen's Harbour Master Portsmouth, Semaphore Tower, Portsmouth Naval Base,
Portsmouth PO1 3LT – Tel: 02392 723694

Southampton VTS Centre, Atlantic Gate, Eastern Docks, Southampton, S01 1AD -
Tel: 02380 608208

Solent Swimming Association, c/o Mr P Collett, 108 Lackford Ave, Totton,
Southampton, S040 9DH – Tel: 02380-865228

Solent Sea Rescue Organisation (SSRO) c/o 99 St Michaels Grove, Fareham, PO14 1DT
Tel: 01329 237463

Ryde Inshore Rescue (RIR), Mr Gordon Osborne MBE, 7 Cherrytree Road, Seaview,
Isle of Wight, PO34 5JF - Tel: 01983 613401

Point of Contact:

Royal Yachting Association, RYA House, Ensign Way, Hamble, SO31 4YA Tel: 0845-345-0374/5.