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# **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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Issue 5 Dated Jan 2011  
Issue 6 Dated Jan 2012  
Issue 7 Dated May 2013  
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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 the English Channel, the cross Solent swimmer has to cross a busy shipping lane, negotiate around ferries and hovercraft travelling to and from the Isle of Wight 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 – Gosport route. It should be read in conjunction with current Notices to Mariners and Standing Instructions applicable to the Ports of Portsmouth & Southampton.

The “Port Marine Safety Code”, first published in March 2002 and recently updated in 2015, details formal procedures that have to be undertaken as part of a Port’s SMS (Safety Management System) before a person can engage in, for example, 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 or Port of Southampton have responsibilities for the safety of their event.” Notwithstanding, note that this requirement always applies, no matter where in The Solent the event is to take place.

These responsibilities 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](http://www.rya.org.uk/legal)). Additionally, a risk assessment template is available on QHM Portsmouth’s website - <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/qhm/portsmouth/leisure/cross-solent-swim> .

Once complete, a copy of the Risk Assessment is to be posted / emailed to the Queen’s Harbour Master, Portsmouth, HM Coastguard and ABP Southampton – address / email details as below.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATIONS**

#### **Notifying the Authorities:**

Before any swim can be undertaken, the authorities responsible for safety and which coordinate the passage of commercial vessels through The Solent need to be informed, and these are:

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**Queen's Harbour Master, Portsmouth (QHM):**

FAO Port Safety Officer QHM  
Room 404a,  
Semaphore Tower,  
HM Naval Base,  
Portsmouth,  
PO1 3LT  
Email: [NAVYNBCP-COBQHMP@MOD.UK](mailto:NAVYNBCP-COBQHMP@MOD.UK)  
Tel: 02392 723117

**Southampton Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Centre:**

Associated British Ports  
37 Berth Eastern Docks  
Southampton  
Hants  
SO14 3GG  
Tel: 02380 608208  
E-mail: [southamptonvts@abports.co.uk](mailto:southamptonvts@abports.co.uk) or [rblair@abports.co.uk](mailto: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:**

National Maritime Operations Centre (NMOC), Fareham  
Unit 12  
Kites Croft Business Park  
Fareham  
Hants  
PO14 4LW  
Tel: 02392 552100  
E-mail: [zone17@hmcg.gov.uk](mailto:zone17@hmcg.gov.uk) or [nmoccontroller1@hmcg.gov.uk](mailto:nmoccontroller1@hmcg.gov.uk)

It is incumbent on the swim organiser to notify, in writing, the above authorities **at least 28 days ahead of the event**, that a swim is planned.

*Guidance Note:*

*With less than 28 days notice, the publication of required Local Notices to Mariners etc may not be achievable and this could therefore prejudice the event.*

The 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.
3. The name and postal address of the swim organiser complete with telephone numbers for home and office hours.
4. The name, size and description of the main safety launch, complete with VHF radio call sign and/or mobile phone number. (\*)

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5. The names, size, description and VHF radio call sign and/or mobile phone number of any other escort or nanny craft .(\*)
  6. Details of other safety cover.
  7. A Risk Assessment has been undertaken and written up and a copy sent to QHM Portsmouth/ Southampton VTS and HM Coastguard (as appropriate).
  8. 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 channel.*

**Safety Cover:**

**Each and every swimmer** shall have an individual safety escort craft, typically a kayak or a canoe.

*Guidance Note:*

*This may be a kayak or canoe, provided they too are escorted by larger safety, escort or “Nanny Boats” capable of recovering all such safety escort craft.*

To assist in the event of a safety emergency occurring, the following information should be recorded and kept with the Organiser and also 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 should be relayed by e-mail to HM Coastguard the day before or 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.

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### **Support or Escort Craft:**

Requirement:

It is a requirement that during each swim at least one powered safety launch is in attendance. It / 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 actions to be taken if a swimmer fails to complete the crossing and has to be removed from the water, and any 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 must take the form of a Marine Band VHF radio which has at least the following channels fitted: 16, 67, 11, 12, 6, 10.

*Guidance Note:*

***There will be no relaxation on this requirement to have a Marine Band VHF Radio available, under any circumstances.***

It should be noted that as Marine Band 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 named authorities must be notified by phone of the organiser’s intentions for that day.

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The 3 named 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 which full details of the event could be obtained should communications with the group be lost.

It should be noted that the authorities must also be notified 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.

*Guidance Note:*

*This call to HM Coastguard proves the safety craft’s communications system is functional.*

**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 vessels; they will also advise these vessels of your status.

**Important Safety Note: Do not expect these vessels to give way to you! You are expected to adjust your passage so that deep draught commercial vessels, warships etc, operating in buoyed, navigational 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

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- 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**

#### **Swim Routes:**

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

#### ***Guidance Note:***

***QHM will not support or approve any cross Solent swim from Southsea / Clarence Pier to the Isle of Wight, or vice versa, due to the complexities involved in crossing 2 shipping channels.***

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 when the current is sufficiently low to allow the swim. Consulting a reliable tidal stream atlas 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

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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 swims of at least a mile should be undertaken.

Except for a smear of Vaseline 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 to The Solent Tidal Stream Atlas is considered essential.

For the Ryde to Fort Gilkicker swim, starting at Low Water, the stream runs eastwards in 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 Fort Gilkicker.

The swim from Fort Gilkicker to Ryde Sands should start at about 2 hours before Low Water and should head towards the tall church spire (Ryde Parish Church) just to the west of Ryde Pier. This heading should be maintained 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 - it is best to 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' (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 swimmers 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 swimmers.

**In terms of visibility, the swim is not to be started if land on the opposite side of The Solent cannot be seen or if the forecast is for deteriorating visibility.**

**On no account, should a swim be attempted 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.

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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.

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## **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 or canoes / kayaks 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 Queen's Harbour Master Portsmouth

VTS Vessel Traffic Service (*Southampton VTS*)

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

HM Coastguard

Queen's Harbour Master Portsmouth

ABP Southampton

Solent Swimming Association

Solent Sea Rescue Organisation (SSRO)

Ryde Inshore Rescue (RIR)

### **RYA Point of Contact:**

Royal Yachting Association, RYA House, Ensign Way, Hamble, SO31 4YA  
Tel: 0845 3450374/5.