

What does sailing safely really mean?

It's not just about knowing the rules of the road or wearing a PFD.

Here are some tips to make your sail on the bay safe and enjoyable.

- Do you wear formal attire when you attend a formal function? Do you wear hiking shoes when you go hiking? Make sure you and your crew are wearing the right clothing. It sounds simple, but on the bay, with constantly changing weather, it's not as simple as it sounds. One great way to maximize your enjoyment is to wear or have available at least three layers. The inner layer is intended to wick moisture away from your body, the middle layer is for warmth, the outer layer is for staying dry. Don't forget about the right footwear. You should be using shoes with non-marking soles that have good gripping capability. While you're probably not going to be doing a lot of walking on a boat, a good pair of shoes enhance your safety and increase your comfort level. Sailing gloves protect your hands without restricting your grasping ability. Don't forget a hat with a clip-on or collar safety string, and keep your sunglasses, sunscreen, and lip balm handy. It's not always cold and foggy!
- How long did you say we'd be out here? That's an important question, especially when the wind dies and you have to be out there a little longer than expected. Bringing along a few simple things, such as water, a snack, and important medicine can really make a difference. This allows you to pass the time in safety and comfort. Before you leave the dock or even arrive at the boat, you might consider getting CPR and first aid training. Both of these keep your friends and loved ones safe on and off the water!
- Who are these people and why did I let them on my boat? Don't be shy about asserting your responsibility as skipper. If you're crew, know what's expected of you before you leave the dock. Although sailing with crew is a cooperative endeavour, it must be understood by all aboard that the skipper is the final authority about boat operation. If you're the skipper, you are responsible for the safety of the people and of the boat. Go over the basics of sailing with both experienced or inexperienced crew. For experienced crew, this avoids arguments about who is in charge, and for inexperienced crew, it makes a lot more sense to tell someone about the dangers of a moving boom while at the dock, than wait until it's actually swinging across the cockpit and yelling "duck!" If you're a member of the crew, do you know what to do if someone falls overboard? What if the skipper falls off or is injured? Do you know how to raise and lower the sails? Do you know how to turn on the engine and radio for help? Don't rely on "someone" to take care of emergencies. Become familiar with the basic things you can do, such as reviewing Crew Over Board (COB) procedures and line handling (watch those fingers near the winch) before leaving the dock.