

**SAFETY**  
ON THE  
**WATER**

A windsurfer is shown in action on a white board, leaning back and holding the boom of a large yellow and purple sail. The sail has the brand name 'Tushingham' and the number '5' printed on it. The background is a clear blue sea with a small rainbow visible in the distance.

# windsurfing

SEA SAFETY GUIDELINES



# Marine Safety Working Group

## Aim

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To use its collective expertise and experience to create and communicate marine safety information and messages to endeavour to reduce accidents and to prevent the loss of life on Irish Waters.

## Objectives

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- To establish strong working relationships with other National and Local Organisations to create/promote accident prevention programmes.
- To establish cause and trends in accidents at sea.
- To develop accident prevention programmes.
- To provide a co-ordinated approach to the dissemination of safety information in response to individual enquiries.
- To measure effectiveness of prevention programmes.

[www.safetyonthewater.ie](http://www.safetyonthewater.ie)

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Preparation is the key to safe windsurfing. The right board, knowledge of weather conditions, windsurfing skills, appropriate clothing and safety equipment are essential.

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It is important to understand the 'rules of the road' and know what to do if things go wrong.

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## **Emergency** **26**

Knowledge can be the difference between life and death. So familiarise yourself with recovery procedures, distress signals, first aid and rescue techniques.

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## **Useful contacts** **33**

We probably can't answer all your questions in this booklet, so we've included a list of people who may be able to help.



**before you start**

## Use the right board and rig

Windsurfing boards come in many shapes and sizes – the bigger/high-volume designs are suitable for all winds and abilities, but the smaller ones are for competent sailors and high winds only. Be realistic about the type of gear you can handle. Bigger boards are much more forgiving of mistakes, and the only choice if the wind is light or likely to drop. If you are hiring, the centre staff will advise on what is appropriate. If you are buying your own gear, seek expert advice from windsurfing shops, schools and magazines. Read the comprehensive test reports provided by *BOARDS Magazine* online at [www.boards.co.uk](http://www.boards.co.uk) If you are unsure about what sort of gear is best suited to your needs, it is probably best to avoid buying second hand – you could end up with something completely inappropriate.



Up until the late 1990s, a 'big board' suitable for beginner/intermediates meant something long – over 3.2m. Since then the market has changed dramatically, with those old 'long boards' now replaced by new high volume short boards, well under 3m long but considerably wider than the old style. These 'widestyle' boards combine plenty of stability with excellent performance for all abilities. Boards are nowadays graded by volume (which should be clearly indicated on the hull). Beginners should look for boards with over 170L of volume, while a progressing sailor who weighs 70 kilograms will need a board with at least 125L of volume for sailing in non planing conditions.

Sails also come in many sizes – try to select a sail that will be big enough to give you comfortable power, but not too big to tire you out. Ask other people on the beach what size is right for the conditions. Remember that it's easier to come back to shore and change to a bigger sail, than it is to struggle back when you're overpowered.

- Insure your windsurfing equipment for accidents, theft, damage and third party cover, which is vital if you are involved in a collision with another craft or swimmer. Third party indemnity is available which would provide cover should you damage anyone else's person or property.



## Master basic skills

Before setting out on your board at an unfamiliar spot, you should possess sufficient skill to windsurf safely. This means a basic knowledge of wind and weather conditions, handling the board and rig, launching and landing, understanding tides, the 'Rules of the Road', self-rescue techniques and maintenance of the board and fittings. The best source for this information is an Irish Sailing Association teaching course. The ISA Go Windsurfing! scheme offers a comprehensive training programme for youth and adult windsurfers, covering all levels of the sport. For information on where to learn, call the ISA on **01 280 0239** or visit their website at [www.sailing.ie](http://www.sailing.ie)



## What to wear

### The wetsuit

Getting wet is half the fun of windsurfing, but unless you're sailing at a warm-water location it also brings with it attendant risks. Once wet you will soon start getting cold. Even if it is baking hot on dry land, the effects of cold water and wind chill mean it will always be cooler when you're windsurfing. You will also become colder the longer you stay out.

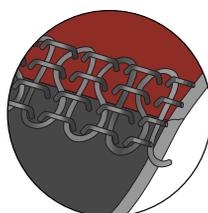
There are only a few days when you can windsurf in Ireland without wearing a wetsuit. Fortunately, with the right wetsuit you can windsurf all day long even in the depths of winter, suitably protected against the effects of wind chill and the possible onset of hypothermia. Suits come in different thicknesses and stitching styles for different conditions; a 5mm thick suit with waterproof stitching and taped seams would be ideal for



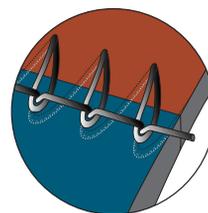
winter use, whereas something much thinner (and cheaper!), will be fine for the summer. Other than getting the right suit for the conditions, the most important consideration is the suit's fit. The principle behind a wetsuit is that the neoprene traps a thin layer of water which warms up to the temperature of your body. A close-fitting wetsuit that doesn't let cold water flush through every time you fall in will make a big difference to warmth and comfort – a baggy wetsuit won't do the job. Try on several suits and sizes before you buy. The tight fit means the neoprene must stretch in the right places to provide maximum freedom of movement. When trying on a wetsuit, bend and stretch in all directions to ensure it is both tight fitting and you can move on the board.

Modern neoprenes are light and supple, and additional laminate materials such as woven titanium allow thinner neoprene to maintain the same body heat. In general, the thicker the neoprene the warmer, heavier and bulkier the suit will be. If you're still cold, a neoprene or pile thermal vest worn underneath will increase the wetsuit's thermal efficiency.

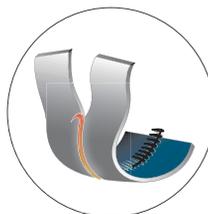
Cheaper wetsuits are assembled using overlock stitching, which punctures the neoprene with hundreds of tiny holes that let water through. These suits are fine for the summer, but unsuitable for winter use. The more sophisticated and expensive wetsuits use blindstitching which only pierces one side of the edge of the panel so water cannot get through. Seams can also be bonded and taped with neoprene glue to produce a completely watertight join.



Flatlock



Blindstitch



Liquid weld

## Types of wetsuit

- The 'steamer' was originally developed for surfers who needed a super-warm, watertight wetsuit which would make it possible to sit in the water and wait for that perfect winter wave. Modern steamers are one-piece, full-length suits that feature watertight seams and watertight zips. This is the top choice for windsurfing at colder times of the year.
- The 'convertible' is a full-length suit with removable neoprene sleeves that can be detached to create a short sleeve/bare arm suit for warmer days. The concept works well; a convertible suit is the ideal summer companion to a winter steamer.
- If sailing conditions are really warm, a 'shortie' wetsuit with short arms and legs allows maximum agility while reducing the possibility of heat loss from the central body.

As wetsuits are generally very dark in colour, it's a good idea to wear a bright, rash vest over the top, making you much easier to spot should you need rescuing.

## You also need...

- Windsurfing shoes or boots will provide maximum grip on the board and protect your feet from cuts or bruises while launching or coming ashore. Neoprene boots with high ankles are essential for keeping your feet warm in winter or spring.
- A neoprene hat makes a big difference to heat loss on a cold day. Wearing a watersports helmet will be almost as warm, with the added benefit of head protection in a wipe-out or collision.



## Do windsurfers need buoyancy aids?

If you can't swim well, you must wear a buoyancy aid. If you can't swim at all, windsurfing is not the right sport for you!

Beginners should always wear buoyancy aids while they are learning. Wearing a buoyancy aid means there is one less thing to worry about when you fall in the water, and the padding provides protection if you fall on the board. Children must wear the correct size. It's a mistake to buy one that they will grow into. An oversize buoyancy aid will not do because the wearer is likely to slip out of it when in the water. Check that a buoyancy aid is the correct size by pulling up on it at the shoulders. If the aid pulls up over the head then it's too big.

Most advanced windsurfers prefer not to wear buoyancy aids, finding them too bulky for fast movements on the board. Wearing a buoyancy aid could make it difficult to swim out from under the rig or chase after a lost board in rough conditions. However, wearing a buoyancy aid will make you feel more safe and secure. (Make sure it fits snugly.) Intermediate windsurfers often find that a buoyancy aid is a big help while they are learning to waterstart.

## Understanding buoyancy aids



- All lifejackets and buoyancy aids should be labelled with the European standard CE mark. Lifejacket and buoyancy aid floatation is measured in newtons – 10 newtons equal 1kg of floatation.
- Buoyancy aids with 50 newtons are recommended for use by swimmers in sheltered waters when help is close to hand. This type is ideal for windsurfing. Buoyancy aids should also be clearly labelled with the weight range they are designed to support.
- The major difference between a buoyancy aid and lifejacket is that a buoyancy aid is not designed to turn the wearer from a face-down position in the water. Wearing a fully inflated lifejacket would be impractical for windsurfing.

## Safety check

Equipment failure is one of the main reasons why windsurfers need to be rescued at sea, so it's worth checking your equipment over regularly to ensure that it is in good working order.

- The universal joint (UJ) is the most vital component attaching the rig to the board. Check for any signs of failure – if there is any doubt, get it replaced.
- Check the fin(s) is/are securely screwed into position. A fin may need to be replaced if it has been damaged through being dragged on the ground or hitting the bottom. If the board has a centreboard, make sure it swivels up and down correctly and is in good condition.
- Check all lines, particularly the outhaul and downhaul, for signs of wear and potential failure. If in doubt, replace immediately.
- Check harness lines for fraying and loose fixings.
- Examine the mast for stress fractures in the boom area and at the base.
- Check that the boom clamp locks correctly and all cleats and rivets are secure at both ends. Check that the extension mechanism is operating smoothly and locks into position correctly.
- Check the mast extension and mast foot release mechanism are in good working order and there is no build-up of grit or sand in the bottom. Rinse these and the boom extension mechanisms in fresh water.
- Examine the sail for wear at all three corners – clew, tack and head – as well as along the batten pockets and luff tube. Make sure battens are correctly tensioned and will not come loose.
- Board and rig should be clearly marked with your name and telephone number using a security pen for easy identification. If they are washed up without you, the Coast Guard will know who to look for!



## Pre sailing check

Before you go sailing, you should always check the following equipment. These simple checks will only take a few seconds but can make all the difference!

- Make sure the deck plate is secure and the rig properly attached.
- Ensure the downhaul and outhaul are properly tightened and the rope ends tidied or stowed away.
- Check that the fin is securely fastened into place.



## Emergency extras

Carrying a few spares, either in a harness pocket, in a bum-bag or inside a boom clamp protector is a very wise precaution.

- A spare line can save the day if something breaks. Carry two short lengths plus a 4m towing line which can also be used to lash the rig or effect repairs.
- A stainless steel multi-tool or penknife may be useful. If you carry it in on your body, make sure there is no risk of injury when falling on the board.
- A dayglo flag will make it easier for rescuers to see you.
- A set of small, mini, or day/night flares takes up little space. There are two types: rocket mini flares and combined hand-held smoke/red flares. The flares must be in-date, and you should familiarise yourself with their instructions for firing. Find the most stable position to sit on the board, keep the flare well clear of your face, hold it as high as possible, and point it downwind so smoke is blown away.



- A whistle and small waterproof torch will be useful if there is any likelihood of getting stuck on the water after nightfall. Be confident that a rescue party WILL be searching for you, because you told someone WHERE you were going and WHEN you would be back. If you are caught in fog or mist, a whistle will be the most useful signal for guiding a rescue boat. Remember the sound may not be audible upwind on a windy day.
- Finally, it's always wise to wear a waterproof watch, so you can keep an eye on how long you've been out on the water. Time can pass very quickly when you're enjoying yourself! However, if you've been out on the water for more than a couple of hours, the tidal conditions will have changed considerably back at the launch spot.

## Modern communications?

- Waterproof hand-held marine VHF radios are becoming smaller and more affordable. They have a range of up to 5 or 6 miles at sea level and can be used to communicate directly and quickly with the Coast Guard, lifeboat and rescue helicopter services as well as other craft on the water. The rescue services can also use them to pinpoint your position. Although they are easy to use, these require an operator's certificate (a one-day course) and an annual licence. For more details contact the ISA.
- Some windsurfers carry their mobile phone (protected by a suitable waterproof case) when windsurfing. Be aware that these can be unreliable because you may not be within range of a mobile phone transmitter/receiver, so it may be difficult to contact the rescue services. They cannot be used to pinpoint your position.



See page 33



- There are many small and low-priced handheld PMR 'walky-talkies' now available with a range of up to 3 miles, very useful for staying in communications with people onshore or other sailors. However, these won't have the emergency/Coast Guard frequencies on, and are not generally used by other boat users.



## Before you go

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Being a windsurfer means taking responsibility for your actions every time you go sailing. Match your knowledge to the conditions and never put your board or yourself at risk. If you stick to that policy, you will have a great time!

- Be realistic about your limitations when it comes to technique, equipment and fitness. Make sure you are sufficiently experienced to windsurf in strong winds or at a new location. Check the wind, sea state, tides and weather forecast. Consult other sailors and be prepared to postpone or abandon your plans.



- Leave details of your windsurfing plans with a reliable person on shore. This should include WHEN and WHERE you are launching, WHERE you are going, WHEN you expect to be back. Plus a DESCRIPTION of the board and rig. If you don't get back, it's nice to know someone will raise the alarm.
- Always windsurf where there are other windsurfers on the water, or in an area patrolled by a rescue boat. It's a great idea to operate a 'buddy system' with two windsurfers minding each other.
- Don't forget to boost your windsurfing energy by snacking on fruit bars, dried fruit or bananas, and keep well hydrated. Drink plenty of water both before sailing and after!

## The launch spot

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Before you launch from a new spot, it's wise to seek advice about the local conditions, tides and hazards from local sailors or the Coast Guard. If there are no other windsurfers around, ask yourself why! Don't rush into launching; watch the other sailors to see where they are launching, landing and how they are coping with the conditions. If in doubt, don't go out.

- Choose a launch spot which is clear of boats, rocks, swimmers and other obstructions. Remember that you may not be fully in control of the board when sailing in gusty winds or choppy waves.
- Show courtesy to other people on the water or on the shore. Be aware that they may not understand the difficulties of launching or landing your board.
- Breaking surf can be very dangerous unless you understand its behaviour. Dealing with shorebreaks is for competent sailors only! The waves will usually be smallest at low tide, and the windward end of a beach will generally have the least surf.
- Be careful of steeply shelving launch areas where you will soon be out of your depth, which can make launching difficult.
- Beware offshore winds! More on this later.



## Tide check

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When sailing at the coast it is important to understand the local tides. Find out from local windsurfers or tidal charts the times of high and low water and whether it is spring or neap tides (the tidal range and currents will be larger at spring tides).

- Time your sailing to fit the tide. The waves will usually be smaller at low tide, but it could be a long walk to/from the water's edge. If the tide is dropping, find out if there are any rocks or sandbars that will become a problem as the waters recede.
- Beware of tidal flows around headlands, which can produce difficult and dangerous waves. If the tide changes direction and wind starts blowing against tide, conditions can rapidly deteriorate. Remember that tidal currents are strongest 2-4 hours after low/high water.
- Never windsurf near a harbour entrance. The tide may flow so fast through the narrows that you cannot sail against it. The board will be swept away like a cork if you fall or drop the rig.

## Wind directions

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### Offshore winds can mean danger!

Most windsurfer rescues are caused by boards and sailors being blown out to sea in an offshore wind. Don't join the statistics!

- Never windsurf in an offshore wind unless you are extremely competent and familiar with the local conditions. (And even then, you should never go out alone.) The wind at the beach is likely to be gusty as it funnels round trees.



buildings and other obstructions on the shore. However, the biggest danger with offshore winds is that everything seems so calm and quiet by the beach, but as you get further out the wind gets progressively stronger and the water more choppy, making it much more difficult and tiring to get back. Every time you fall in you will drift further out to sea. Each time you try to get going, you get more tired. Eventually you won't be able to handle the board at all.

- Now who is going to rescue you? Will you be lucky enough to attract the attention of a passing motorboat? Will the Coast Guard have alerted the lifeboat or helicopter? Or are you on your way to who knows where?

### Onshore winds can mean crunch time

Although the risk of being carried out to sea is much less in onshore winds, these conditions can also cause their own problems. An onshore wind which is blowing straight onto the beach can make launching and landing difficult or dangerous if waves are breaking on the shore. The steeper the beach, the bigger and more dangerous the waves are likely to be. Onshore surf is the most difficult for the windsurfer to negotiate, so is very much for experts only.

- Never stand between board and beach if the board is being pushed back by waves. Beware of the board being turned side-on and rolled with the rig. It may break the mast, even if it doesn't break you!
- Watch the tide. Having launched through small waves on smoothly shelving sand at low water, you could return to find huge waves dumping on to steep shingle at high water.



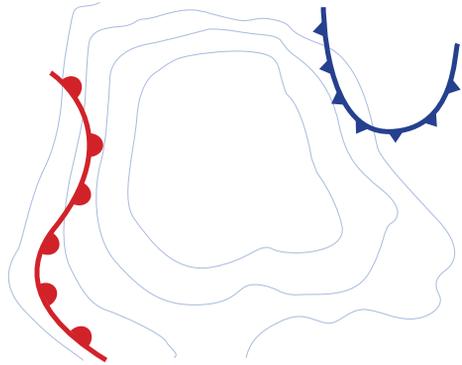
### Cross-shore is everybody's friend

The wind blowing in a generally cross-shore direction is usually the safest and most favourable for windsurfing.



## Weather warning

Remember that the wind may change direction to blow further onshore or offshore while you are out windsurfing! This is why it is important to have checked a forecast before venturing out – if there is a risk that the wind may swing offshore later in the day you should think twice before venturing out.



You should also check whether the wind is likely to increase or decrease during the day. (Bear in mind that a sea breeze will almost always die away to nothing late in the afternoon.)

In addition to the regular TV forecasts, more specific marine forecasts are available through:

- Weatherdial – 1550 123 855
- Weatherfax – 1570 131 838
- Teletext
- Irish Coast Guard Weather forecasts – announced on VHF channel 16 with the Coast Guard radio station's working channel normally used for broadcasts
- National and local radio and TV



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## If in doubt...

Don't go out! If you have any doubt about your ability to windsurf in the prevailing conditions or fear the wind may get stronger, stay dry and be prepared to leave it for another day.

## On the beach

### In cold conditions

Wind chill is not usually a problem when you're windsurfing, but if you're standing around on the beach it can make you very cold.

- Don't just jump out of the car and start rigging in cold, windy conditions. Wrap yourself up as warmly as possible before getting set up, and try to keep out of the wind as much as possible. It's even more important when you come off the water and are wet through. Get out of the wind, get into dry clothes, drink something hot from a flask and if necessary use the car heater to raise your temperature.



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### In hot conditions

- A large proportion of the sun's rays reflect back off the sea, so on a sunny day you are being cooked from both above and below! This, along with the wind chill factor whereby you don't actually realise you're burning, puts windsurfers at very high risk of sunburn. Use a good waterproof barrier cream on all exposed body parts, of a high SPF: 20+ when sailing overseas in the summer, and reapply regularly. Protecting your head with a sun hat is a good idea, and beware of sunburnt feet!
- Watch out for dehydration if you're windsurfing on a hot day. Symptoms may include a parched mouth, a muzzy, tired, headachy feeling and heavily coloured urine. The prevention (and cure) is to keep well hydrated. Pop ashore for a regular drink of fresh water, or carry a water bottle strapped to the mast. Even on relatively cool days the heating effect of a wetsuit combined with strenuous exercise can lead to considerable fluid loss from the body. Remember, if you're feeling thirsty, you're already dehydrated!

## Board and rig safety

- Try to keep clear of crowded beaches and swimming areas. Quite apart from the risk of hitting someone on the water, there is also the high likelihood of someone being injured on the beach by your kit blowing around.
- Never leave an unstrapped board on the car roof – it will quickly blow away.
- Always take your board to the beach first, and if it's windy, leave it facing into wind, pushed down in to the sand. Then take the rig to it and fix it on. An unattached rig should NEVER be left on the beach – it will blow away in surprisingly little wind, and will either injure someone or get damaged/lost.



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- Watch out when you are carrying the board and rig to and from the water. Can you keep control without clobbering some innocent person along the way?

## Launching and landing

Don't get your board in the way of someone or drop your mast on their head. It could land them in hospital and you in court! Some beaches have areas prohibited to windsurfers, and other areas specifically for windsurfers. Check this before you go!



## Practical tip from the Marine Safety Working Group

*Keep clear of swimmers and people simply messing about in the water. Take extra care when you are close to children, who may have no idea of your presence.*



***on the water***

## Be careful

- Don't windsurf miles out to sea – you will quickly become invisible to those on the beach, particularly if you are up-sun of them. There's not really much need ever to go more than 500m offshore. (If things go wrong, you've only got 500m to get back in!)
- Never windsurf in poor visibility or risk being caught by nightfall. If the wind is failing or likely to drop as evening approaches (summer sea breezes etc), return to shore immediately.
- Watch out for weather changes. A line of cloud (or indeed blue sky) moving in, or the build-up of dark towering thunder clouds can both herald major and rapid changes in wind strength and direction. If the weather starts to deteriorate, head for the shore. Big clouds can be accompanied by very strong gusts accompanied by freezing rain or hail, plus you run the risk of being struck by lightning.
- If something does go wrong, keep well organised and don't panic.
- Be realistic about the wind, waves and your ability.
- Never keep windsurfing regardless.
- Be prepared to make for the beach in good time.

## Wipe outs

Falling off or wiping out is all part of the fun. It should be safe if you abide by the rules.

- Stay with the board and don't let go. If you are separated from the board, you should be able to swim and catch it so long as the rig is still attached. If the rig becomes separated, the board may be blown downwind faster than you can swim. Stay with the board at all times if there is a choice. If necessary let the rig go.
- If you find yourself trapped under the sail in the water, don't panic. Grab the boom or mast, and work your way along it to find your way out. Keep hold of the rig and don't let go until you have decided what happens next. If you seem to be snagged on the harness, you will need to quick release from it. Keep hold of the harness though – you don't want to say good-bye to an expensive bit of kit!



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- When you start getting tired, pack up immediately. Don't play the game of "just one more run" – this is always when things go wrong!
- If the conditions are such that you find yourself falling in or wiping out repeatedly, head for shore immediately, before you get too tired to be able to return.
- If you do keep falling off or wiping out, beware of hypothermia. No matter how efficient your wetsuit is, you will eventually feel cold. Don't let this happen – head for the beach before you get cold.

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## Who goes where?

It's important to know who goes where when two windsurfers are on collision course at a combined speed of over 50 knots!

- Port tack gives way to starboard tack. Port tack is when the wind blows onto the port (left) side of the board and rig. Starboard tack is when the wind blows onto the starboard (right) side of the board and rig. Starboard tack has right of way.
- Windward board (or boat) keeps clear of leeward board (or boat). When two boards or boats are on a collision course on the same tack, the one closer to where the wind is coming from must give way to the one downwind. This means that a board sailing on a reach must avoid a board that is beating to windward on the same tack.
- An overtaking board (or boat) must keep clear. If you are going faster than another board or boat, you must keep well clear while going past. Remember that if you are overtaking anything, you must keep clear of it until you are well past and out of its way.
- When sailing in waves, the sailor going out has right of way, even if the sailor coming in has to break off from a nice wave ride to give way! (Many wavesailing breaks also have their own local rules and priority systems – talk to other sailors at the spot to find out about these. Remember – ignorance is never a satisfactory excuse for an accident!)

## Watch out

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It is your responsibility to maintain a good lookout at all times. You must know what is happening ahead, behind, to windward and to leeward, where the view may be obstructed by the sail. Most windsurfing accidents occur when boards collide with stationary objects such as swimmers, boats or fellow windsurfers down in the water. If you are moving and they are not, then you are to blame for any accident.

One of the most important times to check for clear water is before commencing a turn, such as a high speed gybe. Check downwind and behind you to ensure that everything is clear. When sailing in through waves, beware that there might be a downed sailor in front of the wave you are following.

## Other water users

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### Swimmers and surfers

These have right of way over windsurfers in all circumstances.

### Kitesurfers

These are somewhat more tricky to deal with, as the unidirectional 'wakeboard' style kiteboards do not have a clearly obvious port or starboard configuration. In theory, if a kitesurfer is going the same way as you, they should follow the overtaking and windward/leeward rules as described above. And if you're sailing on starboard and there is a kitesurfer coming towards you, you have right of way. Not all kitesurfers are aware of these rules though, so play it safe and give them plenty of room, particularly in the area downwind of the rider, where the kite is likely to be swooping low.



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### Other sail craft

With dinghies and small boats, the essential port-starboard rules and other rules described above apply. With larger boats, a measure of common sense and courtesy is recommended. It is much easier for you to stop or change tack than it is for a large yacht. Think about this when you meet any sailing craft. A windsurfer is faster to manoeuvre, so why not give way? It's a common courtesy which helps give windsurfers a good name.



### Practical tip from the Marine Safety Working Group



*It is also a very good idea to give way to any sail craft involved in a race. They will not thank you if they have to tack off or alter course to go round you!*

## Power gives way to sail

In theory any powered boat should give way to a windsurfer. However, this rule needs to be treated with caution.

- The skipper of a powercraft may ignore or be unaware of the fact that he should give way to sail. He may also be looking in the other direction.
- Boats under sail – including windsurfers – must give way to vessels fishing, vessels not under command (unable to manoeuvre) or vessels constrained by their draught, i.e. powered craft which need to use deep water have right of way when navigating a channel. Windsurfers must keep away from all ferries and other commercial traffic.

## Can't handle it?

If you find yourself unable to get going or you suffer an equipment breakage, you must either stay with the board until rescue comes, or attempt a self-rescue.

In no circumstances should you leave the board and attempt to swim for shore.

Paddling on the board will always be faster, and the board will provide all the flotation you need.

It is also much easier for rescue services to spot than a black wetsuited figure lost in the sea.

As a last resort, abandon the rig and paddle back on the board.

Once on dry land, be sure to alert the authorities that you have abandoned your rig, so it doesn't generate false alarms.





**emergency**

## Calling for help

- If there are boats or people on shore within sight, use the International Distress Signal to raise the alarm by raising and lowering both arms either side of your body. Do not cross them over your head.
- Wave a dayglo flag or blow a whistle to attract attention.
- If you carry flares, only use them as a last resort.
- Use a marine VHF radio to raise the alarm.

If you are on land calling for a rescue for someone else, dial 112 or 999 and ask for the Coast Guard. The service is free – the Coast Guard is there to help.

## When rescue comes

If a boat comes to offer assistance, they will probably never have rescued a windsurfer before. Keep away from their propellor at all costs – they should approach slowly from downwind, and the engine gearshift should be in neutral while you are in close proximity with them. Tell them how you want them to approach, and then discuss how you are going to effect a rescue.

Towing a board and sail through the water is almost impossible as the rig creates too much drag. It is much easier if the rig can be placed on the boat. However, in windy conditions it is difficult and potentially damaging to pass a rigged sail up on to the deck of a boat, so if possible you should derig it first while in the water. If this isn't possible, then the sail should be passed up across the wind, so that it can easily be controlled on the boat. Explain to the rescuer how you will do this, and where they should stand to receive the rig.



Most older boards have a towing eye in the nose, which should ideally be used for the tow-rope. However, many modern boards don't have a towing eye, in which case the easiest option is to lie on the board and hold the rope, or pass it round the mastfoot. Don't try to tow a board backwards by the back footstrap – boards are not designed to travel this way!

- The best rescue boat is a RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat). If the crew know what they are doing, they will get the sailor on to the RIB and motor towards safety with the fully rigged mast held across the RIB and the board alongside. The ISA Safety Boat course promotes appropriate training for Safety Boat coxswains and crew. Contact the ISA for details.
- If an official safety boat or lifeboat approaches, the skipper or coxswain will inform you of his intentions. Follow his instructions – he is the expert. In extreme situations, you may be rescued by helicopter – once again do exactly what the crew says.
- Being rescued may mean having to abandon your board and rig (which should of course be insured). If it's not washed ashore you should inform the Coast Guard as soon as possible, giving a description and approximate position.

## Self-rescue

If you are close to shore, attempt a self-rescue before you become too cold or exhausted. Inform the Coast Guard when you arrive safely because people may have reported that you are in trouble.

- If there is nothing wrong with the equipment but you are simply too tired to continue, use the rig like a flag to blow you downwind. This method will work if the wind isn't too strong, the board is stable and the direction you want to go is downwind! Or simply hold the uphaul so the rig is pulled halfway up with clew and boom end dragging in the water. This will drive the board forwards in a beam reach direction, but becomes tiring as the wind increases and is only practical over short distances.



- If the wind is not blowing in a suitable direction to allow you to drift safely ashore, or you have broken your mastfoot, you may be able to use the Butterfly technique. If the

board is big enough, you can unplug the rig, lay it on to the board with the boom across the board and the mast pointing backwards. Lie flat on the board underneath the rig and over the boom, so your chest is anchoring the rig to the board, and then paddle with your arms. Or you may have to derig completely, and tie the components on to the board, laying across them to paddle ashore.

- A section of mast wedged through the back footstraps acts as an excellent stabiliser to allow you to sit on the board and pack up your kit.

None of these methods are likely to be effective over long distances or in strong winds and waves. If there are other windsurfers to hand you may be able to give one of them your rig to bring ashore (slotted inside their own), while another gives you a tow.

## Broken mast

If the mast breaks at the boom, it may be possible to create a 'jury rig' which will get you home. Slide the sail off the mast, turn the top part of the mast upside down, jam the tip into the broken bottom half and re-rig the sail, so that the top section is flapping loose but there is some shape to the bottom section and the boom can be held comfortably.



### Practical tip from the Marine Safety Working Group

*If you can't paddle ashore, or the equipment all keeps coming undone, you may still have to jettison the rig – remember you are more valuable.*

## First aid



Having a first aid kit in the car and understanding how to administer first aid could help save a life on the beach.

- The ISA and Irish Water Association can provide details of first aid courses which are specifically marine-oriented.



## Hypothermia

Hypothermia is the greatest potential danger for windsurfers in UK waters.

**First stage:** Shivering, looking cold, complaining of cold. Time to head for shore and get into a warm place without delay!

**Second stage:** Lethargy, drowsiness or confusion followed by numbness, cramp, nausea, slurred speech and loss of consciousness. If these symptoms are untreated they can lead to death.

- If a person complains of the cold or shows any symptoms of moving towards the second stage of hypothermia, get them off the water as soon as possible.
- Get them out of the wind and warm them up with dry clothing/coverings and warm drinks, but never alcohol.
- If their condition deteriorates or fails to improve, seek urgent medical attention.



## Artificial resuscitation

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Suspected drowning is extremely rare among windsurfers. However, if someone appears to have stopped breathing due to being in the water, speed is crucial in maintaining oxygen to the brain.

Check for breathing by placing your cheek beside the casualty's mouth and looking at their chest. If there is no sign, begin immediate artificial resuscitation. This technique should be learnt through a first aid course.

## Concussion

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A bang on the head can easily lead to concussion or loss of consciousness. Wearing a watersports helmet lessens the risk and keeps your head warm on a cold day!



## Drink and drugs – don't do it!

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Alcohol will impair your judgement when windsurfing – remember that you are in charge of a craft that travels fast enough to kill someone, quite apart from the risk to your own life. Alcohol makes you feel warmer by opening blood vessels near the skin's surface, but cools your body core. Alcohol also acts as a diuretic which makes you want to pee! Beware of the side effects of any medication which may impair judgement and reduce physical ability.



## Helicopter rescue

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In extreme situations, a dinghy crew may be rescued by helicopter. Use a smoke flare or hand-held red flares as a signal to the helicopter if requested.



## REMEMBER!

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The emergency services are here to help, but would rather do so before you get into trouble! **Free** safety advice is always available – call **1800 789 589**.

# Useful contacts – as referred to throughout the booklet



## Royal National Lifeboat Institution

15 Windsor Terrace, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

Telephone: (01) 2845050 email: [lifeboatsireland@rnli.org.uk](mailto:lifeboatsireland@rnli.org.uk) [www.lifeboats.org.uk](http://www.lifeboats.org.uk)



## Irish Water Safety

The Long Walk, Galway

Telephone: 1890 420202 (LoCall) email: [info@iws.ie](mailto:info@iws.ie) [www.iws.ie](http://www.iws.ie)



## Irish Coast Guard

Leeson Lane, Dublin 2

Telephone: (01) 6785444 email: [admin@irishcoastguard.ie](mailto:admin@irishcoastguard.ie) [www.marine.gov.ie](http://www.marine.gov.ie)

In an emergency, call 999 or 112 and ask for the Coast Guard.



## Irish Sailing Association

3 Park Road, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

Telephone: (01) 2800239 email: [info@sailing.ie](mailto:info@sailing.ie) [www.sailing.ie](http://www.sailing.ie)

## Maritime Radio Affairs Unit (M.R.A.U)

Rm. 328, Department of the Marine and Natural Resources, Leeson Lane, Dublin 2

Telephone: (01) 619 9280 [www.marine.gov.ie](http://www.marine.gov.ie)

## Irish Windsurfing Association

c/o Irish Sailing Association, 3 Park Road, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

Telephone: 01 280 0239 [www.sailing.ie](http://www.sailing.ie)

## Office of the Director of Telecommunications Regulation (O.D.T.R)

Abbey Court, Irish Life Centre, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1

Telephone: (01) 8049616 [www.odtr.ie](http://www.odtr.ie)



## BOARDS Magazine

196 Eastern Esplanade, Southend on Sea

Essex SS1 3AB

Telephone: 01702 582245 email: [info@boards.co.uk](mailto:info@boards.co.uk)

# Marine Safety Working Group

The aim of the Marine Safety Working Group is to promote water safety. The group is made up of a number of organisations representing statutory bodies, search and rescue organisations and water users.

## Who we are:

### Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources

Leeson Lane, Dublin 2  
Tel: (01) 6785444  
www.marine.gov.ie



### Irish Coast Guard

Leeson Lane, Dublin 2  
Tel: (01) 6785444

In an emergency call 112 or 999 and ask for the Coast Guard.



### Irish Water Safety

The Long Walk, Galway  
Tel: 1890 420202 (LoCall)  
www.iws.ie



### Irish Sailing Association

3 Park Road, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin  
Tel: (01) 2800239  
www.sailing.ie



## Lifeboats

### Royal National Lifeboat Institution

15 Windsor Terrace,  
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin  
Tel: (01) 2845050  
www.lifeboats.org.uk



### Bord Iascaigh Mhara

PO Box 12, Crofton Road,  
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin  
Tel: (01) 2845144  
www.bim.ie



### Health & Safety Authority

10 Hogan Place, Dublin 2  
Tel: (01) 6147000  
www.hsa.ie



### Waterways Ireland

20 Darling Street, Enniskillen,  
BT74 7EW, Northern Ireland  
Tel: 048-66323004 (from R.O.I.)  
028-66323004 (from N.I.)

## What we do:

The government department responsible for safety of life at sea & prevention of pollution from ships.

Responsible for co-ordination & implementation of marine search and rescue operations, pollution control & marine radio communications in Irish waters.

The Irish Water Safety Association is the statutory body established to promote water safety in Ireland. We offer courses nationwide that develop skills in swimming, survival and rescue. We recommend that all members of the public learn to swim.

We are the governing body representing sailing, windsurfing, powerboating and personal watercraft in Ireland. We offer a range of training courses for all types of recreational boaters through our network of affiliated clubs and "Recognised Teaching Establishments".

The RNLI exists to preserve life from disaster at sea. This is achieved by providing a fleet of lifeboats, with 24-hour cover and crewed by well-trained volunteers. In addition, we work with other national organisations to promote sea safety. We are funded by voluntary donations.

We are the principal development agency for the Irish seafood industry and promote safe working practices for the industry which involves Fisheries training for both new entrants and practitioners, developing codes of practice, production of training materials and trials of preventative measures against risk on board fishing vessels.

The Health and Safety Authority promotes and enforces good standards in workplace safety. Working with employer and worker representatives, it seeks to ensure that those in control of workplaces adopt safe working practices, as required by law.

Waterways Ireland is a North/South body responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreation purposes. The body has its headquarters in Enniskillen, with regional offices in Scariff, Carrick-on-Shannon and Dublin.

## Also available in the Safety on the Water range

Our range of **FREE** Safety on the Water booklets give the essential safety information that you need – whatever you do on the water.

### Sports and subjects include:

- Dinghy sailing
- Motor boating
- Power boating
- Windsurfing
- Personal watercraft
  - Dive boat
  - Sea angling
  - Surfing
- Commercial fishing
  - Beach safety

To order any of these booklets, or to find out more about free water safety advice, contact any of the organisations listed on page 29



Department of Communications,  
Marine and Natural Resources

