

Sail Martha's Vineyard Coxswain/Safety Course Manual (2026 Edition)

Cornish Pilot Gig Operations (Hybrid Certification)

Purpose: Certify Sail MV coxswains to lead safe gig operations, prevent incidents, and respond to MOB, swamping/capsize, medical events, and cold-water exposure in Vineyard Haven waters.

Course Overview

Audience: Coxswains only. Format: Hybrid (classroom + on-water). Proficiency: Novice Intermediate. Assessment: Demonstration of emergency procedures.

Standards & References: Sail MV Rowers' Handbook (2026 update); CPGA safety expectations; RNLI cold-water shock guidance; USRowing/RowSafe cold-water immersion concepts.

Module A Safety Governance, Local Rules, Equipment (2026)

Safety ethos: Cox = captain; safety first; right to refuse. All participants wear USCG-approved PFDs at all times.

Emergency Plan & Calls: In any emergency call 911 first. Dispatch notifies Harbormaster and responders.

Operating Area: Stay inside West Chop/East Chop line unless pre-approved.

Module B Weather, Go/No-Go, and Ferry Management (2026)

No-Go conditions: air temp < 25 F; wind > 15 mph; wind chill < 25 F; freezing spray; fog < 1/2 nm; darkness.

Ferry Risk: Assume restricted ability to maneuver; respond to five blasts with immediate course change.

Module C Equipment & Go Bag (2026)

Safety equipment: spare thole pins; life ring with 50 ft line; bailers; lights.

Tow: Use RESCUE VESSEL tow line; attach in bow/stern chocks; keep clear of oars/rudder.

Go Bag: whistle, thermal blanket, first aid, strobe, flares, contacts list.

Module D Cold Water, Hypothermia, and PPE

Cold-water shock: first-minute breathing control; Float, Breathe, Think.

Immersion progression: shock -> swimming failure -> hypothermia -> post-rescue collapse.

Module E Commands, Handling, Crew Management

Commands: Prepare to give way; Give way together; Hold water; Back water; Fall in; Ship/Stow/Toss/Lay down oars.

Buddy system: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6+cox.

Module F Emergency Procedures

MOB: Hold Water; Bow points; throw life ring; shift weight; recover at seats 3-4; call 911.

Capsize: stay with boat; account for crew; board hull; re-entry or tow; go-to sites.

Tow: Use rescue vessel tow line; communicate speed & heading.

On-Water Practical Drills

Sequence: Safety brief -> Capsize -> Re-entry -> Tow -> Extraction -> Debrief.

Assessment

Criteria: Pre-row brief; MOB within 5 min; [capsize management](#); 911 communication; post-immersion care.

Recordkeeping: annual drills required (September each year).

Appendix

Contacts: 911 first; VH Harbormaster 508-696-4249; USCG Woods Hole 508-457-3277; Sail MV Office 508-696-7644.

Go-to sites: Owen Park; VHYC; Grove Ave; Beach Road Ramp; Hines Point; Eastville Beach; Sail MV Boathouse.