

Should You Protest?

Safety and fair play are behind the right, and sometimes the duty to protest. Without a healthy respect for the rules by participants, mayhem is possible. The onus to enforce the rules falls on the participants themselves not the Race Committee.

In the past, protesting has been discouraged in handicap racing unless paint is exchanged. When the objective is mostly fun and friendly competition, who wants to complicate matters by dissecting the finer points of the rules?

That standard might not always be enough to insure safety with such a large fleet, and with skill levels ranging from novice to expert. Everyone has a right to expect safety and fair play, and these two things must always remain a priority.

Handicap racing is not quite as competitive as PHRF racing, but no less in need of order. The willingness to protest is an essential component of PHRF racing, but does handicap racing need that level of strictness?

Some middle ground is called for to assure a knowledge of the rules, and safe boat handling. Handicap fleet skippers have a judgment to make when there is an incident. Did it involve an important safety issue, or did it influence the outcome of the race? If so, the red flag might be in order.

If the incident was minor, or an inconsequential infraction, a "You owe me one" (at the bar) might be the appropriate remedy if the perpetrator seems contrite. This resolution doesn't dismiss the incident, and will probably result in a better understanding of the rules in a congenial atmosphere where learning and camaraderie are also important objectives of handicap racing.

In the end, there are no guidelines. You have the right to protest any violation of the Racing Rules of Sailing or our own SI's as you see fit.