DISTRESS BEACONS SAVE LIVES
REGISTER, CARRY AND KNOW HOW TO USE THEM

THE SKY IS FALLING
Keep clear of overhead loads

LESSONS LEARNT BY ACCIDENT

DECEMBER 2010
ISSUE 19
Contents

06 Don’t cross if you don’t know how
A man drowned crossing a bar in heavy seas

08 Alcohol, cannabis and cold can kill
Even a short trip at night can be fatal

09 The sky is falling
Keep clear of overhead loads

13 Stick to the plan
Men separated after an accident sparked an unnecessary search

14 Distraction causes roll over
A moment’s inattention has serious consequences

16 High-risk trip ends in death
Bad weather, alcohol and no lifejacket a fatal mix

18 Cold claims skipper 30 metres from shore
A man died after entering the waters of a snow-fed lake

19 Keep alert on the home stretch
An experienced skipper grounded in familiar waters after a long trip

Features

10 Distress beacons save lives

17 Report accidents and incidents online

Regulars

03 Introduction

04 Guest editorial:
Keeping visitors safe on the water

20 News and updates
Welcome to our last issue of *Lookout!* for 2010.

With summer underway, we can all hopefully take time to get out and enjoy the outdoors. The downside of the marked increase in activity on our seas, rivers and lakes is an increase in maritime accidents and incidents.

As a skipper, it’s your responsibility to ensure those on board have a safe and enjoyable experience. Ensuring your boat is up to scratch and carrying out pre-boating checks will help you have trouble-free boating. Make sure you have lifejackets of the right size and type for all on board, carry at least two reliable forms of communication, check the marine weather forecast before setting out and avoid or limit alcohol intake.

These are basic safety messages, but as you’ll read in this issue of *Lookout!*, they’re messages that are all too often ignored by recreational boaters.

Two of the recreational boating fatalities in this issue are from accidents where at least two of those factors were involved. One fatal accident involved all of the risk factors – boating without a lifejacket, in bad weather, after drinking alcohol, without means of communication.

Another featured a man without a lifejacket, who made a short trip after drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis, and probably capsized when transferring from a dinghy to his yacht.

There are two other recreational fatalities in this issue. In one case the skipper was not wearing a lifejacket, and in the other a man wearing a partly donned lifejacket was trapped as a vessel capsized during a bar crossing.

Accidents can and do happen at any time without warning, and the presence of any of the risk factors significantly increases the danger. The higher the number of these factors, the greater the risk. This summer we’re continuing with our “Wear your lifejacket – it’s that simple” campaign, and encourage you to wear yours.

Thankfully, none of the commercial accidents and near misses in this issue resulted in fatalities, but there were several injured passengers in one accident and a near miss for a stevedore. These commercial accidents show the need for constant vigilance and keeping a lookout.

In the guest editorial, Tourism Industry Association advocate Evan Freshwater looks at the adventure tourism industry and the work being done to keep people safe on the water, including pre-summer safety checks and workshops.

This issue’s safety feature looks at distress beacons, one of the forms of communication Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) recommends you carry on you, if you’re a recreational boater, and have on board if you’re from the commercial sector. Distress beacons are used on land, sea and in the air, and the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand – which is part of MNZ – is responsible for responding to all distress beacon alerts. Knowing how your beacon works and what sort of response will be launched will help you understand its strength and limitations.

On behalf of MNZ, I’d like to wish you all a safe, happy and relaxing holiday season.

**Catherine Taylor**
Director of Maritime New Zealand
Capturing our nation

Today, Kiwis on their OE can catch the occasional glimpse of our iconic scenery on billboards or in London’s underground – part of Tourism New Zealand’s “100% Pure” campaign, which is now over 10 years old. Often featured are our familiar bays, rivers and lakes, with the sea kayak, whitewater raft or jet boat filled with happy visitors. Thrills on the water

Put to great effect by jet boat operators like Shotover Jet, New Zealander Bill Hamilton’s great invention, the Hamilton Jet unit gives close to 200,000 visitors a year an adrenaline kick and something to talk about with their friends back home. Just about as many again experience a slower, but no less exciting trip down New Zealand’s steeper rivers under their own steam, rafting the Rangitata, Buller, or the Kaituna with its 7 metre waterfall.

Interaction between Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) and the tourism industry ranges from commercial vessels under safe ship management, to Maritime Rules Parts 80/81/82, to guidelines – one of the most flexible models to appear over recent times. Guidelines covering kayaking, whitewater sledging/boarding and paddle craft rental are now in place and are observed by the majority of operators within these sectors. The difference in MNZ’s approach to regulation of these activities since the inception of Rules Part 80 for rafting and jet boating in the mid-1990s has allowed for greater industry ownership of each sector’s operating procedures and operational safety.

Continuous improvement

The Tourism Industry Association New Zealand (TIA) believes the real safety experts are the ones who are in or on the water every day, and we know that commercial operators are constantly working on ways to improve customer and staff safety. MNZ’s guidelines ensure these industry experts have their say in ensuring all safety management systems developed remain relevant to their business.

The industry/regulator relationship, throughout the adventure tourism industry, is an interesting one. In years gone by, the relationship has, at times, been considered by the industry to be adversarial, with the regulator enforcing the rules – generally through prosecutions. This means there is the potential for operators to under-report...
Tourism Organisations (RTOs) to run a small series of pre-summer safety forums suitable for adventure and outdoor operators, to ensure operators are well prepared for the upcoming summer. These forums discussed the systems and processes operators want working well (something akin to a pre-summer safety checklist), and this year we also discussed recommendations from the adventure review.

Working together to promote safety

The relationship between MNZ and the tourism industry has never been stronger. The recent cooperation between government and private agencies in the review of risk management and safety in the adventure and outdoor commercial sectors in New Zealand has shown the real benefits of a strong regulator/industry relationship.

TIA is the largest representative body of tourism operators in New Zealand. TIA is a membership-based and private sector trade organisation with more than 1,500 members – from small operators through to large companies – who collectively make up 85% of the country’s tourism turnover.

TIA has five main areas of activity: advocacy and policy, events, industry development, working with other organisations, and communications.

TIA believes the industry is in a sound position for the future. Minister of Labour Kate Wilkinson’s decision to support industry-led practices, supported by regulators where necessary, is a good endorsement of the MNZ approach and the guideline model is one we expect to see developed more widely throughout the entire adventure tourism industry.

A strong partnership and open communication between private sector leaders and the government is vital for a strong tourism industry”

Evan Freshwater, camping alongside the Clarence River.
Tourism Industry Association New Zealand
A man called out to his friends shortly before he drowned under the upturned hull of a recreational vessel, which capsized during a bar crossing in heavy seas.

The man and three of his colleagues had set out that morning to go fishing in the 6.15 metre aluminium boat. The vessel’s skipper had little bar crossing experience. On the way out, he crossed successfully by following the path of a ship out of the harbour entrance and over the bar.

Later, the men realised the conditions were too rough and decided to head back over the bar and find a more sheltered spot inside the harbour.

By now, there was an ebb tide. The skipper told the other men to act as lookouts for waves, and started the crossing. One of the men saw a large wave hit the vessel from behind, causing it to roll heavily. Looking back, the man saw a second large wave coming and started jumping clear when it crashed over the vessel. The vessel capsized, but the man was wearing a lifejacket and popped up clear of the boat.

The skipper was pushed up into the floor of the upturned vessel by his lifejacket. He struggled to take off a heavy weather jacket, which he thought would drag him down. In the process he lost his lifejacket but was washed clear of the boat.

The third man was trapped under the vessel as it capsized. He managed to take a gulp of air and push down to get clear. He was tumbled around by the sea before he surfaced. The fourth man was also trapped. He was heard calling out to his companions several times to not leave the boat, but went quiet after a few minutes. It was not possible for the other men to attempt a rescue.

After some time, the two men in the water pushed the skipper, whose condition was deteriorating, up onto the upturned hull. Both of the men in the water were wearing lifejackets. One had his donned correctly, but the other had not correctly donned his and was unable to do it up fully. The two men clung to either side of the vessel, alerting each other every time a large wave approached.

By chance some hours later, a person out walking on a nearby cliff top spotted the stricken vessel and raised the alarm. The men had been in the water for more than eight hours by the time Coastguard arrived.

The three survivors were taken to shore, and the vessel was taken under tow. During the righting process, the fourth man’s body slid free. He was wearing a partly donned lifejacket.

“The men had been in the water more than eight hours by the time Coastguard arrived”
These men were in the water for more than eight hours because no one was looking for them. The skipper had not told the Coastguard via VHF radio that he was intending to cross the bar, and so the vessel’s progress was not being monitored.

Vessels should contact Coastguard on marine radio before attempting a bar crossing, and again when successfully across.

Only one man wore a correctly donned lifejacket for the whole trip. The remaining three did not don them correctly and, as a result, the lifejackets slipped off in the water.

Lifejackets must be worn on all vessels whenever there is increased risk and failure to do so is an offence. Crossing a bar is always risky and lifejackets must be worn.

The vessel’s VHF radio had been turned off, as the master incorrectly believed it was out of range.

The vessel’s VHF radio had been turned off, as the master incorrectly believed it was out of range. Two cellphones were on board, but these were not protected from water and not carried by the men. Without protection from a plastic bag, cellphones immediately become useless even if splashed by salt water.

VHF radios should be kept on and channel 16 should be monitored by all craft. Waterproof hand-held radios are the only type that will work after immersion or capsize.

The vessel had flares and a beacon, but these were stowed forward inside the boat and the men could not grab them in time. Some vessels float level when inverted, and in these situations it is possible to enter the boat and retrieve them while breathing air trapped under the vessel. However, in this case, this would not have been possible.

Only one of the men was suitably dressed, wearing several layers. This man said he was quite warm in the water. The other men wore only shorts and T-shirts, and their strength deteriorated quickly in the water.

The tide was ebbing when the men chose to re-enter the harbour. The wind opposed the tide and this created a very steep short sea, making the boat more prone to broaching and capsize. Although the sea was rough, the vessel was more than capable of remaining outside the harbour until the conditions improved as forecast, provided sufficient fuel was carried.

Bar crossings are hazardous. Every bar is different and this skipper had little experience of this bar. He chose to enter despite this inexperience, in poor conditions and without ensuring adequate communications. It is always more difficult to assess a bar from the sea than from the land.

Seek local knowledge about the bar you will be crossing and, if you can, practise crossing with an experienced skipper on board to guide you.

Read about bar crossings in Issue fourteen of Lookout! – Beware of the bar or visit the MNZ website:

BEFORE YOU CROSS A BAR

THERE ARE 10 IMPORTANT SAFETY TIPS YOU SHOULD FOLLOW

1. Check the weather, tide and bar conditions
2. Contact Coastguard or Maritime Radio immediately prior to crossing
3. Ensure adequate stability
4. Batten down
5. Lifejackets must be worn and all crew must be awake
6. Approach at moderate speed
7. Post a lookout to monitor sea conditions astern
8. Communicate your successful crossing to Coastguard or Maritime Radio
9. If in doubt – don’t cross
10. Avoid ebb tide

Right: To order this handy sticker email publications@maritimenz.govt.nz or phone 0508 22 55 22
A man drowned in the cold waters of a marina after spending the evening drinking at a nearby bar, and then attempting to transfer from a dinghy to his yacht. The man was alone, in the dark, and was not wearing a lifejacket. He had intended to sleep on his yacht while it was moored in the marina, and had borrowed a dinghy from the bar where he had been drinking.

“He had intended to sleep on his yacht while it was moored in the marina, and had borrowed a dinghy from the bar where he had been drinking”

His body and the capsized dinghy were found the following morning. It is thought that the dinghy may have capsized while the man was attempting to climb onto the yacht, spilling him into the sea.

The coroner found that alcohol, cannabis, cold water and the failure to wear a lifejacket or buoyancy aid were all factors in the man’s death.

Accidents can happen anywhere, even in the relatively sheltered waters of this marina.

LOOKOUT! POINTS

- A post-mortem examination found the man’s blood alcohol level was well over the legal limit for driving a car and that he had consumed cannabis. Alcohol and cannabis impair thinking and reaction times, making transferring from a dinghy to a yacht more difficult than usual, and making it harder to clamber back out of the water. Alcohol lessens the body’s ability to survive in cold water, and can cause disorientation.

- Lifejackets must be worn in all situations where there is increased risk. Someone boating at night and alone is already at increased risk. Partaking in alcohol and cannabis add significantly to that.

- Although a yacht moored in a marina may seem only a short distance from shore, the effects of cold water can prevent a person from swimming even a few metres.

This accident highlights the dangers of underestimating the seemingly innocuous waters of a familiar marina. Regardless of where an accident happens, the effects of alcohol, drugs, cold water immersion and no lifejacket remain the same.
Stevedores work in a high-risk environment and need an ever-present sense of danger. But when you’re doing the work every day, repetition can erode your alertness.

This year, a 40 foot container crashed onto a busy New Zealand wharf during unloading. There was no warning. Thankfully no one happened to be on that part of the wharf at the time.

Engineers concluded that the crane’s hydraulic brake motor had failed. The crane was shut down until it could be repaired, and all others cranes on board were checked.

The sky is falling

No matter how long they’ve been doing their job, stevedores should always keep clear of overhead loads – as this incident shows, there’s no way of knowing when brakes might fail or wires part.

Crane drivers share responsibility with those working below. If a crane driver cannot not see the hold or area they are operating over, they should request signalling from someone who can.
Distress beacons save lives

**WHAT IS A DISTRESS BEACON?**

A distress beacon is a portable electronic device that you can use to alert rescuers that you are in a life-threatening situation and need help.

When activated, the beacon sends out a signal that is picked up by a satellite and relayed to search and rescue authorities. The beacon’s signal provides a geographical location and also transmits a unique identification number that tags it to a specific owner.

Distress beacons operate on the 406MHz frequency. The Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ) monitors this frequency around the clock, and responds to all beacon alerts on land, sea or air within New Zealand’s search and rescue region.

**WHY CARRY A BEACON?**

A distress beacon is one of the most reliable ways of signalling that you need help in an emergency.

New Zealand’s rugged landscape and changeable weather mean you can get into trouble in remote areas very quickly. Other ways of calling for help can be useful, but they have limitations. VHF radios and cellphones may be out of range, have limited battery power or be damaged by water.

You should always carry more than one means of reliable communication.

**WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF BEACON?**

Different beacons are designed for use in different environments. Although they all work in the same way, you should choose the beacon that is most suitable for the activity you are undertaking.

The three types of beacon are:

1. **EPIRB (emergency position-indicating radio beacon) – for use on boats and ships**

EPIRBs are waterproof and designed to float upright to optimise their signal. They can be activated manually, and some are self-activating in water and may float free of a vessel in an emergency. Many have strobe lights and lanyards, with brackets to fit them to your vessel.

2. **PLB (personal locator beacon) – for use in remote locations**

PLBs are smaller portable devices typically carried by trampers, climbers, hunters and people working in remote areas. PLBs are increasingly being used on boats, but may not be fully waterproof or able to float. They are activated manually and usually have a shorter battery life than EPIRBs once activated.

In the outdoors, you should always carry your PLB on you. Out on the water, attach it to your lifejacket or clothing where it can be reached easily in an emergency.

3. **ELT (emergency locator transmitter) – for use in aircraft**

ELTs are fixed to an aircraft and designed to activate on impact, but can also be manually activated in an emergency.

Beacons with in-built GPS are strongly recommended because they can quickly provide a very accurate position to RCCNZ and dramatically reduce the response time. Non-GPS beacons rely on orbiting satellites to identify a position, which can take more time.

Choose the beacon that suits the activities you are involved in. Your local beacon supplier can guide you. Suppliers are listed on the beacons website: [www.beacons.org.nz](http://www.beacons.org.nz).
A distress beacon is activated.

1. Its signal, with its unique identification number or Hex ID, is transmitted to the nearest satellite.

2. An alert is sent to the nearest local user terminal.

3. The alert is processed by the nearest mission control centre and forwarded to the rescue coordination centre.

4. The rescue coordination centre mobilises rescuers and directs them to the beacon’s position.

For more information about the satellite system, go to www.cospas-sarsat.org.

WHY IS THE RESPONSE NOT ALWAYS IMMEDIATE?

RCCNZ usually receives alerts from distress beacons within minutes. Depending on the type of beacon you’re carrying, it can take two hours or longer for satellites to pinpoint your location. That’s why it is vital to take other safety precautions, such as checking the weather before you go out, carrying the right survival equipment and telling your emergency contacts where you are going, the route you’re planning to take and when you intend to be back. It can also take time for emergency resources to be launched and to reach you.

A beacon that is equipped with built-in GPS is highly recommended and can greatly speed up a rescue response. A GPS-equipped beacon sends geographical coordinates that are accurate to within about 120 metres of your position, whereas non-GPS-equipped beacons are accurate only to about 5 kilometres.

If you get into difficulties when the weather is very bad, be prepared for a long wait – rescue services may not be able to reach you at night or in extreme conditions, even when they know where you are.

WHY SHOULD YOU REGISTER YOUR BEACON?

Register your beacon so that, in an emergency, RCCNZ can find your contact details, information about your vessel or aircraft, and names of people who may be able to provide valuable information about your party and your plans. This will help ensure RCCNZ can launch the most appropriate response.

Having your beacon registered also prevents search and rescue resources being needlessly sent out if there is a false alarm.

Registering your beacon is vital for your safety and it is free. It is also a legal requirement.

To register your beacon, phone: 0508 406 111, email 406registry@maritimenz.govt.nz or visit the beacons website www.beacons.org.nz.

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO WORK YOUR BEACON?

Read the instruction manual and familiarise yourself with how your beacon operates before you take it out.

Check the expiry date for the battery, which is shown on the beacon label. Batteries should be replaced by your supplier or agent (see the website www.beacons.org.nz for details). Make sure your beacon is registered and the registration is kept up to date.
**WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR BEACON IS ACCIDENTALLY ACTIVATED?**

If your beacon is set off accidentally, phone RCCNZ immediately on 0508 472 269. This will ensure a search and rescue operation is not launched needlessly. If you are unable to contact RCCNZ immediately, switch off the beacon and make contact as soon as you are able to. There is no penalty for accidental activation.

**HOW DO YOU DISPOSE OF OLD BEACONS?**

Old or obsolete beacons need to be disposed of carefully, to ensure they are not set off by accident. Do not just throw them away, as a lot of time and money has been spent on search operations to dig beacons out of rubbish tips.

The battery needs to be disconnected and the beacon disposed of according to local regulations, as many beacons contain hazardous materials. The names of distributors who dispose of old beacons can be found at [www.beacons.org.nz](http://www.beacons.org.nz).

**REAL INCIDENTS: REAL RESCUES**

*“My husband is hunting on his own in Fiordland. He’s pretty tough and it must be serious if he has set off his beacon.”*

Photo: Barry Harcourt

A helicopter winched a hunter with three broken ribs and a badly punctured lung from this steep country after he fell.

*“Mum and Dad have gone out in the boat to check their cray pots.”*

Both crew were thrown overboard when a swell rolled their 5.2 metre pontoon boat. Their EPIRB was activated and a water rescue team recovered the couple safely.

*“The aircraft is up-country. My husband is doing some work on a station there, but I can’t reach him by phone.”*

When this light aircraft crashed in hill country, the plane was extensively damaged but the pilot was rescued with only superficial injuries.

**REMEMBER**

- Buy the right beacon for your purpose
- Register it with RCCNZ – it’s free
- Keep your registration details up to date
- Know how to use your beacon before you go out
- Stow or carry the beacon correctly
- Be prepared to wait until help can reach you
- Do not turn your beacon off until rescuers tell you to
- If your beacon is activated accidentally, phone RCCNZ on 0508 472 269 immediately.
Stick to the plan

A jet boat skipper now realises the importance of sticking to the rescue plan and having a way to communicate after sparking an air and land search.

The skipper and two companions set out for a day’s jet boating, travelling several hours upstream without incident before deciding to pull in to the river bank for some food and drink. When the men went to refloat the vessel, the starter failed to engage and the battery quickly ran down. They decided to float in the current all the way downstream to the jet boat’s trailer.

About an hour into the journey, the men were still about 2 kilometres from the trailer. “We drifted around a bend and into a group of willow trees in a pool off to the side,” the skipper says.

“We pushed the back of the boat off the first tree, but the nose hit the second tree and rode up over it. That sunken the back left-hand corner just below the water line and the boat barrel-rolled and capsized.”

Two of the men were washed into the water, but were quickly able to grab on to the willows and clamber along to the bank. The third man was swept about 100 metres further downstream with the jet boat, before he too was washed onto the bank.

“So we were on the bank, but there was a line of willows between us and the water. We couldn’t see him, but as we walked down the bank, we could hear him calling out.”

Once the men could hear each other well enough, they agreed that the skipper would walk about 50 metres to the road and hitch a lift down to collect the jet boat’s trailer. His companion would walk around the willow trees to meet the other man, and these two would wait for the skipper to return.

“And that’s about where it went to custard, really,” the skipper says.

While the skipper flagged down a car and headed off to collect the trailer, the man who was on his own decided to hitch a lift as well and find his friend, rather than waiting where he was, as planned.

“So now he was in another car about 5 or 10 minutes behind me, and the other guy was wandering around the willow trees trying to find him.”

Meanwhile, a farmer had witnessed the capsize and gone down to the river to check that everyone was safe. By now, the remaining man was starting to become concerned that he couldn’t find his friend on the other side of the willows. “So that’s how the rescue services got called,” the skipper says.

“I arrive back at the trailer to find police, rescue helicopter and ambulance – and my mate turns up in another car not far behind me.”

“The third man was swept about 100 metres further downstream with the jet boat, before he too was washed onto the bank”

“The jet boat was towed slowly to shore, with stops to empty water on the way to reduce the damage to the bottom of the hull.

The next day, when the jet boat had washed down-river, the owner, driver and friends went out to recover it using two vehicles.

All three men were wearing lifejackets, but none carried a cellphone in a waterproof plastic bag or other means of communication.

“We usually carry phones, but this time everyone assumed someone else had their phone with them. You’ve got to make sure you’ve got some kind of communications device with you at all times,” the skipper says.

Despite agreeing on a rescue plan, not all of the men followed it.

“Sort it out properly. You need to have a better game plan than just yelling at each other through the willow trees.”

Drifting down-river was not a safe option. The men should have paddled the vessel directly to the nearest safe bank after discovering the engine would not start.

Special thanks go to the skipper of this rescue vessel for his willingness to share his experiences for the benefit of others.
Eighteen passengers slid into the canopy of a jet boat when it rolled over on a shallow braided river.

Seconds before the impact, the driver had been pointing out a flock of Canadian geese. He did not see a small raised shoal approaching, and made a last-minute sharp right turn to try to avoid it.

The jet boat was too close to avoid the shoal and the sharp right turn caused the rear to skid to the left. As it hit the shoal, the right side of the jet boat tipped up into the air.

Those on board heard a loud grating noise that slowly grew louder, and many said they expected the vessel would fall back the right way up.

Instead, the jet boat continued to roll over until it was completely inverted. The passengers were flung onto each other while the vessel was tipping. One suffered a broken collarbone, another was burned and blistered by leaking fuel, and several passengers suffered bruises to their shoulders and legs.

Once the jet boat had come to rest, the driver checked for injuries and helped passengers climb free of the vessel. They waded through 30cm deep water to reach the shore.

Distraction causes rollover

“Instead, the jet boat continued to roll over until it was completely inverted”

The jet boat driver had considerable experience on the river and with the vessel. Despite this expertise, just a moment of inattention had serious consequences. All people operating vessels at high speeds need to maintain a constant vigil over both the craft and their environment. When beaching became inevitable, the safest method would have been to take off all power and point the boat straight ahead, as company procedures advised.

About three seconds before the accident, the driver had been pointing out a flock of Canadian geese to the passengers. Although the driver was also acting as a tour guide, his primary responsibility was to keep a good lookout and ensure the safe operation of the vessel. Company standard operating procedures supported this by identifying several positions along the river where drivers could pull in and point out items of interest.
“The passengers were flung onto each other while the vessel was tipping”

Left and middle right: The driver had not seen a small raised shoal approaching.
Right: The jet boat rolled until it was completely inverted.
Below left: A helicopter was used to right the jet boat.

Below: Some of the passengers were injured and the jet boat was damaged in the accident.
A lodge worker used an inflatable dinghy to cross an inlet at night in driving rain, despite friends asking him not to go.

The vessel and the man’s body were found by searchers the following afternoon.

The man worked for a local lodge and had borrowed the lodge’s 4.2 metre rigid-hulled inflatable, intending to drop off some rubbish across the inlet and then visit some friends before returning.

The trip was 2.5 nautical miles each way, and the man knew the route well. The return trip was a straight line most of the way, with a left turn once the lights of the opposite shore were in view.

On this day, the lodge worker took the inflatable across to drop off rubbish, and then joined friends at a barbecue on the foreshore. He stayed for the afternoon, drinking alcohol and socialising.

At about 11.30pm, he decided to head back across the inlet. His friends tried unsuccessfully to dissuade him, and watched as he drove the vessel off through the heavy rain. He had worn a lifejacket on the trip over, but was not wearing one as he set off.

The following afternoon, the lodge staff, who assumed the man had stayed overnight on the other side of the inlet, discovered that he had headed back the previous evening. Those who had waved him off did not know until then that he had not arrived.

Searchers found the abandoned vessel later that afternoon. Towards evening, the man’s body was found floating face down in about 1.5 metres of water.

“He had worn a lifejacket on the trip over, but was not wearing one as he set off”

The man’s body was found floating in about 1.5 metres of water. His injuries suggest he may have hit his head on the centre console after the vessel struck the seabed and stopped suddenly.

LOOKOUT! POINTS

- The vessel was found in an area that suggests the man did not make the left-hand turn the route required, but instead carried on straight ahead. The driving rain and poor visibility may have prevented him from seeing the shore lights that were usually used as a guide to make the turn.

- The vessel’s outboard motor was stopped, but the ignition key was on, with the ignition lights and buzzer operating. The engine was in gear, about three-quarters ahead. The tank was three-quarters full.

- The man’s injuries suggest he may have hit his head on the centre console after the vessel struck the seabed and stopped suddenly.

- It is not known whether the man was conscious when he entered the water. Had he been wearing a lifejacket, it would have kept him upright and supported his head, even if he were unconscious. Although the man left his lifejacket behind, there were eight others on board the vessel.

- The man drank significant amounts of alcohol during the afternoon and evening. At the post-mortem, his blood alcohol level was well over twice the legal driving limit. It is likely that alcohol impaired his decision-making and navigational ability.

- The search did not begin until well into the following afternoon, because the man had not alerted anyone on the opposite shore that he was making the journey so late at night. Those on the opposite shore were not expecting him, and those he left behind had no reason to suspect he did not make it. A call to a responsible person on the opposite shore would have triggered an emergency response much sooner.

- Boating alone at night increases risk. Poor weather further increases risk, as does drinking alcohol, not wearing a lifejacket and the lack of a trip report or ability to communicate distress. These risk factors have a compounding effect when combined.
We've been looking at how to make reporting accidents quicker, simpler and easier for you to do.

Commercial operators and recreational boaters will be able to report accidents, incidents or serious harm injuries online by completing and submitting an electronic form directly to MNZ. We’ve tested the online accident reporting system with industry stakeholders from the jet boat, rafting, fishing and passenger sectors in Queenstown, Christchurch, Auckland and Wellington, as well as with some recreational boaters. We’ve used their feedback to make changes to the design of the form to ensure it will be easy for you to use.

Industry feedback so far has been positive, and it is widely agreed that the new system will be a valuable alternative to the current paper-based system.

We’ll be monitoring responses to the online forms and making improvements where necessary to make sure that the forms are as clear and straightforward to fill out as possible.

What happens to the information collected?
We use the information to track trends in accidents, incidents, serious harm and fatality statistics and to get a clearer picture of where we need to focus our efforts or develop resources or rule amendments.

Why should I report an accident?
You are legally obliged to report accidents. Under Section 31 of the Maritime Transport Act 1994 (MTA), masters and skippers have an obligation to report all accidents, incidents or serious harm injuries to MNZ, as soon as practicable. Commercial operators have an obligation to report serious harm injuries under Section 25 of the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992. If you fail to report, you can face substantial fines.

Why is online reporting better?
It’s quicker, easier and you’ll get confirmation that we’ve received your form straight away. It’s also tailored, rather than one-size-fits-all, so you’ll only have to fill out the sections that are relevant to you.

What about paper forms?
We’ve updated our paper forms and these will also be available on our website when the online forms are rolled out. You will be able to download these forms, print them out, fill them in and fax or scan and email to us – but it will be quicker and easier to complete a form online.

When can I use the online system?
We’re making our final tweaks to the forms and hope to roll out the system by the end of January. If you need to report a serious accident between now and when the system goes live, phone RCCNZ on 0508 222 433 to let them know what has happened.

For all accidents, incidents and serious harm injuries download and submit the paper forms from the website at www.maritimenz.govt.nz as soon as you can.
A skipper died after being overcome by cold, unable to remain afloat without a lifejacket. He entered the 9 ºC waters of a snow-fed lake while trying to disentangle troll lines at the stern of a 17 foot recreational vessel. The skipper was planning to spend an afternoon fishing with a passenger and his two young children. The group was part of a larger party spending the weekend together at the lake. Before heading out to fish, both young children were fitted with lifejackets, but although there were plenty available on board, neither adult donned one.

When the vessel was about 20–30 metres from shore, the skipper realised some of the troll lines had snagged and headed to the stern to free them. He stopped the trolling outboard motor by pulling the safety key out of the kill switch and clipping it to a string beside the switch. The skipper worked on untangling the lines without success. He sat with his legs dangling over the transom and then entered the water.

Although his reason for entering the water remains uncertain, the vessel owner commented that a rod was missing from on board and speculated the skipper may have dropped it over the stern and entered the water to retrieve it.

He was also worried about leaving his two children alone on the vessel. The passenger clambered back on board and tried to throw lifejackets in the skipper's direction, but these fell short. He tried to start the motor, but as he had little boating experience, he did not realise he needed to insert the safety key.

In a final attempt, the passenger donned a lifejacket and leaped back into the water. Again, he could not reach the skipper, and once he was back on board he saw the skipper slip under the water.

The passenger tried to paddle the boat towards the skipper without success. He managed to paddle the boat to shore and raise the alarm. The larger group and members of the public began searching, but could not find the skipper. Later, a police dive squad recovered the skipper’s body from about four metres of water, close to where he had last been seen.

Cold claims skipper 30 metres from shore

“He tried to start the motor, but... did not realise he needed to insert the safety key”

Although his reason for entering the water remains uncertain, the vessel owner commented that a rod was missing from on board and speculated the skipper may have dropped it over the stern and entered the water to retrieve it.

Once in the water, the skipper quietly asked for a pole. By the time the passenger had retrieved the oar from its position under the seat, the vessel had drifted away from the skipper.

The passenger jumped into the water without a lifejacket to assist the skipper, but quickly realised he would not be able to swim any distance in the cold water.

“The crewman jumped into the water without a lifejacket to assist the skipper”

The passenger tried to paddle the boat towards the skipper without success. He managed to paddle the boat to shore and raise the alarm. The larger group and members of the public began searching, but could not find the skipper. Later, a police dive squad recovered the skipper’s body from about four metres of water, close to where he had last been seen.

LOOKOUT! POINTS

- Boaties are required to wear lifejackets in situations of heightened risk, such as on the cold waters of a lake. Had the skipper been wearing a lifejacket, he would almost certainly have survived, as he was within 30 metres of shore when he entered the water.
- Many local body bylaws require lifejackets to be worn in vessels of six metres or less, and many boaties have adopted this safety precaution.
- The coroner hearing the case, David Crear, said “everyone who uses a small boat, no matter how old they are or how calm the water is, should wear a lifejacket”.
- This accident shows how suddenly things can go wrong in the marine environment. The passenger commented about the speed of events, “everything was fine. Within 15 seconds there was a disaster”.
- The passenger was not an experienced boatie. Before departure, skippers should ensure others on board have enough basic knowledge to operate the vessel and use communications equipment if the skipper becomes incapacitated.
- If the passenger had a means to call for help, he would have been able to raise the alarm and stay at the scene.
- Carrying two forms of reliable distress communication on board is essential. The most appropriate communication varies from area to area, as not all inland waterways have cellphone or VHF radio reception. In this case there was no cellphone reception or VHF coverage. Other distress communications include 406 MHz distress beacons, flares and whistles.
- The waters in New Zealand are usually either cold or very cold. The body’s automatic response whenever skin is suddenly cooled is called ‘cold shock’ and there is no way of preventing this.
An inshore launch master grounded a vessel on a charted rock while operating the vessel’s radar. He had not skippered the launch before.

The skipper agreed to move the vessel as a favour to its owners, and departed in the morning with one crew. After more than 10 hours at sea, the vessel was approaching its destination. The skipper was a local, and knew the area and rock hazards well, but as the vessel’s radar was set at 12 nautical miles, the skipper decided to reduce the range to 1.5 nautical miles. It was dark and the skipper could not see the coast. As he concentrated on the radar, the skipper lost awareness of where he was. He had been looking down at the radar for about 15 seconds when the vessel hit a rock at about 7 knots.

The vessel started taking in water through a hole in the bow. The skipper made an emergency VHF radio call and the vessel was attended by the local fire brigade, who managed to control the ingress with portable pumps while the vessel was towed to port.

“As he concentrated on the radar, the skipper lost awareness of where he was”

Conservation of heat is essential. The body naturally adopts the huddle position, but this is only possible if a lifejacket is worn. Without one, moving limbs to swim or stay afloat causes heat to be lost at twice the rate of the huddle position, and drowning occurs due to loss of coordination and muscle strength.

Heart rate and blood pressure increase (sometimes dangerously), and breathing rates and air intake rise sharply. Many people do not survive cold shock (even strong swimmers) and can drown shortly after entering the water. However, those wearing a lifejacket almost always survive.

Cold shock wears off after about three minutes, when normal breathing returns and panic subsides. Limbs then start to cool and, depending on the water temperature, quickly lose strength and coordination (after just minutes normal bodily functions that enable a person to swim, operate a radio or fire a distress flare can be compromised).

Conservation of heat is essential. The body naturally adopts the huddle position, but this is only possible if a lifejacket is worn. Without one, moving limbs to swim or stay afloat causes heat to be lost at twice the rate of the huddle position, and drowning occurs due to loss of coordination and muscle strength.

Read about the effects of cold water on the body online or in Issue twelve of Lookout! – Survive in cold water.
NEW SAFETY BULLETIN
Fishing vessels drifting at night

This safety bulletin highlights the legal requirements for fishing vessels, and any other ships, if they apply the practice of drifting at night.

MNZ has issued a safety bulletin to focus on the key issues associated with the practice of drifting at night: watch-keeping and lookout; navigation lights; engines; fatigue management; and location and forecasting. It also makes recommendations.

Please see Safety Bulletin 24, December 2010: Fishing vessels drifting at night on the MNZ website for more information.

www.maritimenz.govt.nz

Back issues of Lookout! and Safe Seas Clean Seas available

We have a limited supply of back issues of Lookout! and Safe Seas Clean Seas. If you’d like us to send you some, email publications@maritimenz.govt.nz.

18 Maritime fatalies 2010

From 1 January to 30 September 2010 there were 18 fatalities – 8 in the commercial sector and 10 in the recreational sector.

This compares with 4 commercial and 14 recreational fatalities for the same period in 2009.

Free subscription to Lookout! and Safe Seas Clean Seas

To subscribe or unsubscribe to these free quarterly publications, or to change your address details, email us at publications@maritimenz.govt.nz or phone 0508 22 55 22.

Disclaimer: All care and diligence has been used in extracting, analysing and compiling this information, however, Maritime New Zealand gives no warranty that the information provided is without error.

Copyright Maritime New Zealand 2010: Parts of this document may be reproduced, provided acknowledgement is made to this publication and Maritime New Zealand as the source. Products shown in Lookout! as part of our education messages are examples only, and are not necessarily favoured over any other similar product.