

MAIB

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

ACCIDENT FLYER

FATAL INJURIES FROM PROPELLER



Narrative

A family were enjoying their first narrow boat holiday together on a hired boat. The hire company had provided buoyancy aids and shown the family how to manoeuvre the boat and operate the locks on the canal before they set off.

Two days into their holiday, the family approached a lock which was obscured from their view by a bend in the canal and a bridge immediately ahead of the lock gates. Their boat came level with another hire boat moored in the lock waiting area, and the family realised that they needed to move astern to moor and wait their turn for the lock. With the wind blowing down the canal, from bow to stern, the helmsman put the propeller into reverse, but was unable to prevent the bow being skewed at an angle across the canal. The boat then made contact with the stern of the moored narrow boat and a family member jumped from the stern to the bank with the stern mooring line to help secure the boat safely.

The boat then made contact with the canal bank, and the helmsman was seen to tip over the guard rail, which was at about knee height and fitted round the cruiser style stern. He managed to hold on briefly, with his legs hooked over the rail, before dropping into the water on the outboard side. The crewman with the stern line jumped back onboard and stopped the engine, but could not see the helmsman in the water. Although buoyancy aids were available on the boat, the helmsman was not wearing one. A lifebuoy was thrown into the water, but with no sign of the helmsman, the crewman jumped into the canal to assist. The crewman quickly found the helmsman's leg, but could not pull him free. Another family member and the helmsman of another boat jumped into the waist deep water to assist, but the helmsman was entangled in the propeller.

The crewman climbed back onboard and removed the weed hatch in the engine compartment to gain access to the propeller. He could see the helmsman was trapped by torn clothing, with his head and arm caught in the propeller. Using scissors, he managed to free the helmsman, and with the assistance of the emergency services who had quickly arrived at the scene, the helmsman was recovered to the canal bank. He had suffered severe injuries to the back of his shoulders and head. His left arm was very nearly severed and he was pronounced dead at the scene.

The Lessons

- 1. Although serious accidents are rare on the inland waterways, boaters, and particularly those new to boating, should be aware of the potential hazard posed by a rotating propeller.**
- 2. All responsible people on board should be familiar with the actions to take in an emergency and be able to stop the propeller quickly if needed.**
- 3. Boaters should check canal maps for potential obstacles such as locks and bridges, and slow down if the view ahead is obscured to avoid having to make difficult manoeuvres at short notice.**
- 4. Although guard rails are not required on narrow boats, where they are fitted, they should be of an appropriate height to prevent people from falling overboard near the propeller.**

This flyer can also be found on our website:

www.maib.gov.uk

Alternatively, further printed copies can be sent on request, free of charge.

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