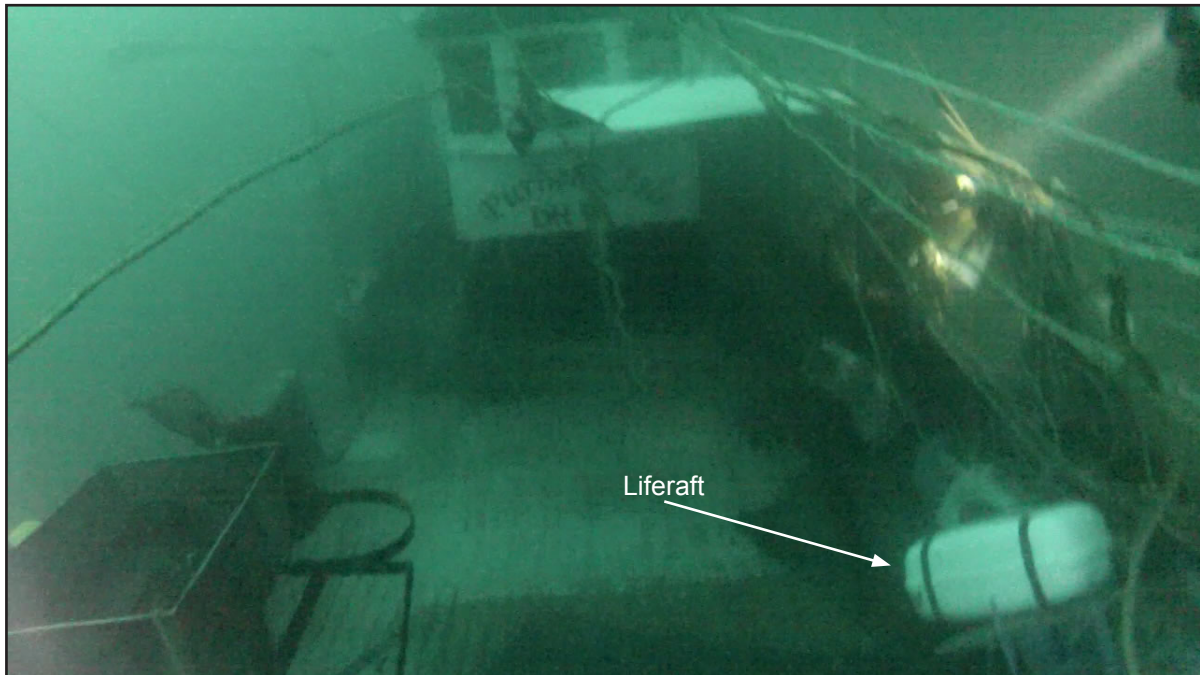


FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

***Purbeck Isle*: Foundering resulting in the loss of three lives**



Narrative

On 17 May 2012, the skipper of the UK registered fishing vessel *Purbeck Isle* and his two young crewmen died because the vessel's liferaft failed to float free and automatically inflate when the 11.6m wooden potting vessel sank suddenly off the coast of Portland, England.

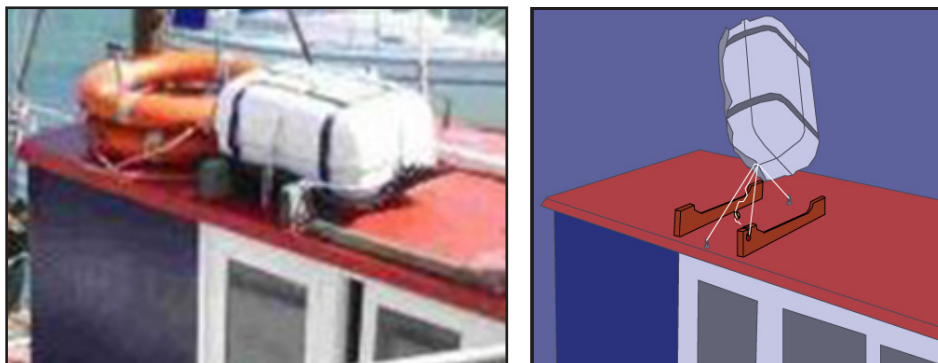
The day before the accident, the fishermen had moved about half of the vessel's whelk pots from the skipper's preferred sheltered winter grounds in Lyme Bay to deeper grounds 9 miles south of Portland Bill. On the day of the accident, the fishermen had left Weymouth harbour at about 0415 with the intention of relocating the remainder of their gear. When they arrived at their winter grounds the crew hauled and stacked 5 or 6 strings of pots onto *Purbeck Isle's* deck and the skipper then headed the vessel south towards the grounds. At about 1000, shortly after the crew had begun to re-shoot their pots 9 miles south of Portland Bill, the heavily loaded wooden vessel suddenly foundered.

Purbeck Isle went down so quickly that the fishermen were unable to broadcast a "Mayday", collect their lifejackets from below deck, or manually launch the vessel's four man liferaft prior to entering the water. As the vessel sank, the hydrostatic release unit (HRU) used to secure the liferaft in its cradle on the wheelhouse roof activated as designed, but the raft failed to float free and sank to the seabed 50m below. As *Purbeck Isle* was not fitted with an EPIRB or similar emergency distress signalling device, over 7 hours elapsed before a concerned local fisherman alerted the coastguard to the fact the vessel was overdue. By this time, all three fishermen had most probably already succumbed to the effects of the cold choppy seas.

Safety Lessons

A liferaft is required to be stowed and secured in such a way that it will float free of a sinking vessel and automatically inflate. Had *Purbeck Isle's* liferaft floated free and inflated as the vessel sank, it is entirely possible that three lives would have been saved.

The investigation found that although the liferaft's HRU activated as designed, *Purbeck Isle's* liferaft failed to float free and automatically inflate because it had not been correctly stowed or secured in its cradle on the wheelhouse roof. Because the liferaft canister did not fit snugly into its cradle, the skipper had applied additional lashings to prevent it from falling off the wheelhouse roof in heavy seas. These additional lashings had been intertwined with the liferaft's main lashing rope and they prevented the raft from floating free.

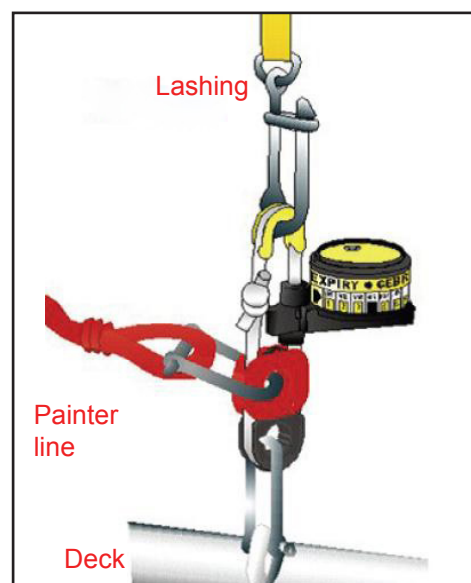


However, had the liferaft floated free, it would not have automatically inflated because its painter had not been attached to the HRU's weak link. The liferaft had also been stowed upside down in its cradle. This would have allowed water to build up inside its canister, reducing its inherent buoyancy and increasing the likelihood of its inflation mechanism suffering from corrosion and failing.

Liferafts save many lives every year, but they are often found to be rigged incorrectly. In order to prevent similar failures in the future, fishing vessel owners are strongly advised to ensure that:

1. Liferafts are stowed and secured in accordance with the guidance provided in MGN 343 (M+F) (www.dft.gov.uk/MCA/).
2. They follow the instructions provided by liferaft and HRU manufacturers.

Note: CM Hammar's website includes free interactive training aids and video clips that show clearly and simply how its HRUs should be rigged and how they are designed to work in an emergency (www.cmhammar.com).



This flyer and the MAIB's investigation report are posted on our website: www.maib.gov.uk

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May 2013