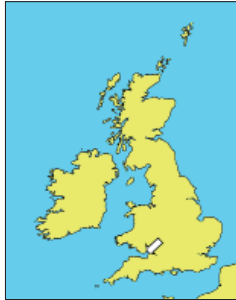


SYNOPSIS



At approximately 1830 on 26 August 2008, a 55 year old female passenger on board the 9m rigid inflatable boat *Celtic Pioneer* suffered a lower back wedge compression fracture. She was participating in a 1 hour boat trip in the Bristol Channel with 10 colleagues as part of a corporate team building exercise. The injury occurred when the passenger landed heavily on her seat after she was momentarily lifted into the air due to the motion of the craft. She was treated in hospital and fitted with an external spine brace before returning home to begin a 6 month recuperation programme.

Boat trips of varying intensities in small, fast, commercial craft have grown in popularity in recent years. However, these craft are particularly susceptible to relatively high levels of shock and vibration when transiting choppy or disturbed waters when the risk of spinal and other injuries in these craft is increased. The MAIB is aware of 28 accidents that have resulted in lower back compression injuries on board RIBs since 2001, one of which occurred in April 2009. The risk of this type of injury can be reduced by the skill of a boat's coxswain, boat design and procedures such as the exclusion of individuals particularly at risk for medical reasons.

The operation of boats conducting thrill rides and similar activities is not specifically included in the current MCA codes of practice, and there is no industry approved code of practice. Consequently, the standards of safety management among UK operators of these boats vary considerably.

A recommendation has been made to the Passenger Boat and Professional Boatman's Associations to develop an approved code of practice for thrill-type rides in the UK. A recommendation has also been made to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and the Royal Yachting Association with the aim of raising the qualification requirements for boat coxswains undertaking these activities. A further recommendation, intended to raise awareness of the dangers of shock and vibration in small fast craft, has been made to the Royal Yachting Association. A recommendation has also been made to the Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services and the Institute of Licensing with the aim of encouraging operators to adopt the code of practice when completed.