

MAIB SAFETY BULLETIN 3/2005

Very serious injury to the 13 year old co-driver
of a powerboat following a collision in a
junior offshore powerboat race
in Portland harbour on 19 June 2005

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This document, containing safety lessons, has been produced for marine safety purposes only, on the basis of information available to date.

The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2005 provide for the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents to make recommendations at any time during the course of an investigation if, in his opinion, it is necessary or desirable to do so.

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) is carrying out an investigation into the accidental collision between two boats during a junior offshore powerboat race that resulted in a very serious injury to the 13 year old co-driver of one boat on 19 June 2005. The MAIB will publish a full report on completion of the investigation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Meyer', with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Stephen Meyer
Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents

This bulletin is also available on our website: <http://www.maib.gov.uk>

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BACKGROUND

At about 1320 on 19 June 2005 two powerboats collided in a junior offshore powerboat race which resulted in a very serious injury to the 13 year old co-driver of one boat.

The race was part of a national powerboat racing class organised and run by a private racing club affiliated to the Royal Yacht Association, where children aged between 8 and 16 years of age race 12 foot/3.75 metre boats powered by a 25HP engine around a set course at speeds in excess of 25mph.

The injured child was wearing a Mark 10 Gecko Marine Safety Helmet which became dislodged during the collision and was found in the sea a short distance away from the boat.

The Mark 10 marine safety helmet is tested to the PAS028.2002 standard by British Standards Institute and CE marked for use by persons with a head circumference of between 57 and 62cm, which is the average head size for an adult male. However, subsequent investigations by the MAIB have identified a widespread misconception among many users that the helmet is "one size fits all" and offers protection to all, including children. A description of the product on the manufacturer's website could have been construed to infer the helmet was "one size fits all". Gecko Head Gear Limited has undertaken to remove this wording from their website.

Further investigation by the MAIB has found that the helmet type was developed with the assistance of and specifically for the dangers confronted by crew members in the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and similar marine emergency service users. It was not designed for those partaking in high speed powerboat racing, and does not have the impact protection recommended by the RYA for headgear used in that activity.

However, the Gecko Mark 10 is the only helmet in the U.K. designed specifically for use in a marine environment. There is some concern that helmets which have not been designed specifically for marine use have other safety drawbacks - most specifically a scoop effect, when the wearer enters the water at speed, which could lead to serious neck injuries. Therefore, at present there does not appear to be a helmet available which is completely suited to this type of activity.

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All users of marine safety helmets are strongly advised to ensure:
 - the helmet is a proper fit, by ensuring the wearer's head is not free to turn inside the helmet and removal of the helmet by rolling it forward and down is not readily possible; and
 - recommended donning instructions are complied with each and every time the helmet is used

2. The ongoing MAIB investigation into this accident has revealed safety concerns and uncertainty over the specified standard for helmets (BS 6658B) recommended by RYA for use in powerboat racing.

As a consequence, the RYA is recommended to:

- 2005/192 Conduct a risk assessment to establish the suitability of its existing recommended standard of helmet, BS6658B, for use in each class of RYA powerboat; liaise with the British Standards Institute to identify suitable standards if the outcome of the risk assessment determines this to be required and work with industry to ensure the availability of such helmets.