

MAIB SAFETY BULLETIN 1/2005

Two fatalities from a high-speed

Rigid Inflatable Boat accident

March 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.

A man and his teenage daughter died during a day trip on inland waters, in their rigid inflatable boat. The MAIB investigation of the tragedy revealed the hydraulic steering system of the RIB was in poor condition and the boat carried no basic safety provisions. With the onset of the summer boating season, it was considered essential to promulgate the lessons to emerge from the investigation so far, so the MAIB has issued this Safety Bulletin. A full report will be published in due course.

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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THE ACCIDENT

The owner of a 6m RIB took his two teenage daughters for a day trip in sheltered waters. It was the first of the season, the boat having been laid-up for the winter. The RIB was powered by a 150hp outboard and was capable of speeds in excess of 50 knots. The water temperature was 3° C, the air temperature about 5° C and the wind strength was Force 4. All were wearing warm clothing, but were not dressed for entering the water and **were not wearing lifejackets.**

During the day out, the RIB's steering was described as difficult, the wheel needing many turns to achieve any movement of the engine. On their way back to the launch point at the end of their day, the owner was steering, the younger teenager was sitting behind him, and the elder girl was standing behind the seat holding the backrest. The RIB was travelling at full speed when it suddenly lurched, throwing the owner and his younger daughter out of the boat. The elder teenager was thrown to the deck but remained in the boat which, because **the kill-cord was not in use**, continued away from the two people in the water. Although the elder girl managed to control the RIB and return, with difficulty, to the casualties, there was insufficient time to rescue them before they disappeared below the surface. **There were no flares or radio onboard** the RIB so the survivor was unable to raise the alarm immediately.

After the accident, investigations discovered the oil level in the hydraulic steering system in the RIB to be very low, and there were indications that the system had been leaking for some time. It is probable that air in the system caused the engine to lurch unexpectedly to one side, causing the accident.

SAFETY LESSONS

Any unintended movement of the outboard engine on a planing craft can be highly dangerous. It is therefore **essential** that owners and users of powerboats ensure that steering systems are fully operational before using the boat. It is especially important to ensure hydraulic systems are topped up as required and are checked for leakage. If the owner or user is in any doubt about the condition of the steering system, they should **seek professional advice.**

All powerboat users are further strongly urged to ensure that:

- Kill-cords, where fitted, are used correctly.
- All crew and passengers are wearing suitable clothing and lifejackets.
- They have the means to summon assistance: ideally a VHF radio, or in the very least distress flares.