

MAIB SAFETY BULLETIN 3/99

mfv Rachel Harvey

Grounded and foundered off Peninnis Head
St Mary's, Isles of Scilly
with the loss of one life

1 October 1999

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

The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 1999 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 grounding and subsequent foundering of the fishing vessel *Rachel Harvey* on 1 October 1999. One fisherman drowned. The MAIB will publish a full report on completion of the investigation.

Because track control systems are being used with increased frequency in fishing vessels, this Safety Bulletin is issued to alert owners and skippers to the potential hazards of using them without adequate training.



J S Lang
Rear Admiral
Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Background

The fishing vessel *Rachel Harvey* was heading for St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, in poor weather and was approaching the eastern end of St Mary's Sound.

The sole watchkeeper was navigating using a track control system that had been fitted in December 1998 and had been used extensively since. The system interfaced a Global Positioning System (GPS) navigator with an autopilot and enabled the GPS to give heading commands directly to the autopilot to steer towards a selected waypoint.

The video plotter was not being used for navigation and neither the intended track nor the vessel's position were plotted on the chart. The watchkeeper did not understand how the interface functioned and tried to alter course using the autopilot's course setting knob while the interface was connected. The system did not allow it.

The vessel grounded on Peninnis Head, and foundered within two or three minutes. One of the crew lost his life.

Safety Recommendations

1. Owners and skippers are reminded that a track control system, unlike a video plotter or positions plotted on a chart, does not give a continuous visual indication of the vessel's position relative to the required track. It is essential to establish that clear water exists between the vessel's start position and the waypoint to which it is heading. While on passage and being steered automatically, the vessel's actual position must be checked by some reliable alternative means to ensure the projected track is safe. Such checks will alert the watchkeeper if he is standing into danger.
2. Modern technology has an important part to play in the safe navigation of vessels but, in untrained hands, it can lead to disaster. System handbooks are often difficult to understand. Hands on training is most strongly recommended for watchkeepers to ensure they can use the equipment correctly, know its limitations and, above all, be familiar with the procedure to be used to override it to alter course.
3. Track control systems should never be used in confined waters or when operating in close company of other vessels.
4. A track control system will relieve the watchkeeper of certain routine tasks, but **NEVER** his primary responsibility of maintaining a proper lookout.

5. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency has issued a useful Guidance Note (MGN) 84(F) on navigational safety. Watchkeeping fishermen who may not be familiar with this document and its advice for keeping a safe navigational watch should read it carefully. It addresses over-reliance on the use of electronic navigation systems.

Press Enquiries: 0171 890 4691 / 3387; out of hours: 0171 873 1985

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