

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fatal man overboard from the stern trawler *Copious* (LK 985), approximately 30 nautical miles south-east of the Shetland Islands, Scotland, on 18 February 2021

Image courtesy of David Meek (marinetraffic.com)



Copious

Narrative

On 18 February 2021, at night and in a 3m following swell, a deckhand drowned after falling overboard from the twin rig stern trawler *Copious* while he was attempting to repair the gear.

The deckhand had identified a failed hammerlock while hauling the nets and had climbed onto the aft bulwark on the vessel's main deck to attempt a repair. He lost his balance and fell overboard. The deckhand was conscious and wearing a lifejacket, which automatically inflated. Although he was quickly brought alongside the vessel, the crew's attempts to recover him back on board were unsuccessful. The crew had practised throwing a lifebuoy and deploying the man overboard recovery equipment during man overboard drills. However, the lifebuoy was thrown to the deckhand after he became unconscious, and the recovery equipment was left unused. The MAIB investigation found that *Copious* did not carry the required supplementary equipment for its man overboard recovery system to be used to safely recover unconscious casualties.

The deckhand's lifejacket was not being worn correctly and it did not keep his airways clear of the water when he succumbed to the effects of cold water incapacitation and fell unconscious. The deckhand was unresponsive when recovered from the water by a coastguard helicopter and he was pronounced dead on arrival at hospital.

Safety lessons

1. The deckhand stood on the aft bulwark without taking any safety precautions to prevent him falling overboard. Working over the side of the vessel, especially from a vulnerable position like a bulwark, should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Essential tasks must be carefully considered, and control measures that reduce the risk of falling overboard to an acceptable level must be put in place and communicated to the crew.
2. The deployment of the man overboard recovery equipment was among the first actions taken during drills that had been practised on board. However, the recovery equipment was not deployed when the deckhand fell overboard, which significantly reduced his chances of recovery while still conscious. It is vital that realistic man overboard drill scenarios are practised to ensure an effective and prompt response in a real situation. The early deployment of the recovery equipment in this case would have significantly improved the deckhand's chances of recovery and survival.
3. There was little chance of recovering the deckhand back on board once he had fallen unconscious. This was because the crew were unaware that supplementary training and equipment were needed for the safe recovery of an unconscious casualty using the onboard man overboard recovery system. When selecting recovery equipment it is essential that its suitability for recovering unconscious casualties is considered.
4. The deckhand was wearing an auto-inflate lifejacket, which inflated when he fell overboard. Unfortunately, the waistbelt was very loose and the crotch strap had not been used, which meant that when he became unconscious it rode up around his face and he drowned. The manufacturer's instructions on how to correctly wear inflatable lifejackets should always be followed as this will afford both the casualty and their crew mates precious extra time during a recovery attempt.

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

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Publication date: June 2023

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NOTE

This safety flyer is not written with litigation in mind and, pursuant to Regulation 14(14) of the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012, shall be inadmissible in any judicial proceedings whose purpose, or one of whose purposes is to attribute or apportion liability or blame.

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