

	Lessons Learned	
	25-001 Hover Craft Operations/Recovery	
	Incident Date	Revision Date
	August 11 2025	

Lessons Learned – Joint SAR Incident (RCMSAR DRV, CCG Sea Island, USCG)

1. Situation

During a 2025 Search and Rescue (SAR) event, an RCMSAR vessel was tasked to recover an unresponsive individual from the water. While the RCMSAR crew was attempting a recovery, a Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) hovercraft arrived on scene and deployed a diver to assist in the recovery. Communications were not successfully established before or during the diver deployment. While the diver was between the two vessels, the two vessels came uncomfortably close to each other and to the diver in the water (under 5 feet) which caused significant concern aboard the hovercraft. The CCG hovercraft ultimately recovered the person, and the RCMSAR vessel departed without further incident.

2. Observations and Contributing Factors

Communications

- Neither vessel successfully established communications on VHF prior to the diver entering the water.

Key Point: When multiple SAR assets are operating in proximity, communications are critical, and all efforts should be made to establish and confirm radio communications. A dedicated radio watch must always be in place.

Situational Awareness

- The RCMSAR crew was entirely focused on recovering the person from the water; consequently, all four members were heads-down over the side attempting to parbuckle a heavy individual.
- The vessel's helm was left unattended.
- A proper lookout was not maintained, and consequently, the crew did not immediately observe the hovercraft's approach or diver deployment.

Key Point: Maintaining SA is critical and a collective responsibility. At least one crew member must monitor the surroundings, be aware of changing circumstances, and respond to them.

Command and Control

- There was an expectation by the RCMSAR crew that the CCG would assume the role of On-Scene Commander (OSC), but this was never confirmed between units.

Key Point: The On-Scene Coordinator must be clearly identified and confirmed early in any multi-unit response. If in doubt, confirm with arriving assets or MCTS before continuing with recovery actions.

Hovercraft Familiarity

- The RCMSR crew was not familiar with the operational characteristics of the hovercraft.

Key Point listed. RCMSAR stations should make every effort to train regularly with other SAR assets in their area.

Lessons Identified

Communications

- Establishing communications between all SAR units early is critical.
- RCMSAR crews must maintain a continuous radio watch.

Situational Awareness

- Always have a crew member at the helm.
- Always maintain a proper lookout.
- If unclear of another unit's plan, stop and clarify.

Command and Control

- Confirm who is acting as On-Scene Commander.
- Communicate updates frequently as conditions or participants change.

Hovercraft Familiarity

- Understand the operational characteristics of CCG hovercraft, including skirt and finger hazards.
- Keep engines clear of hovercraft skirts
- Maintain adequate distance from divers when they are in the water.

