



Lessons Learned Report 2015-03

Overview:

This past summer there were two incidents where casualties that were recovered on board threatened the safety of our crews. These incidents raised an important perspective that we rose with Coast Guard and have been exploring solutions to ever since. Even though we are coming to the aid of a person or group in distress, that person or group may not want our help or could be a threat to our crews.

Incident #1:

A crew was tasked to respond to a vessel that had capsized close to shore. The group had been watching a fireworks display and ended up flipping their RHIB. There were four persons on board. Upon approaching the scene the crew discovered two women on a beach close to the capsized vessel. They made a shore approach and brought the two women on board. The Coast Guard were also on scene and focused on recovering the two males who were part of the group but had swam to adjacent locations. While returning the two women to the marina, they became aggressive and abusive to the crew. The Coast Guard had to be called over to assist with talking them down and ensuring the situation didn't escalate further. They were then safely brought ashore where RCMP waited.

Incident #2

A crew was tasked to respond to a person in distress on a secluded shoreline during the night. They arrived on scene and discovered a male in the trees of the shoreline soaking wet. He was brought on board and it was then discovered he had a loaded rifle down his pant leg. He also had a backpack with a number of knives in it. The gun and backpack were taken away and he was brought to shore where RCMP and EMS were waiting. It was later discovered that RCMP had been searching for this individual and he could have been dangerous.

Lessons to be learned:

There were no errors in either of the situations by the crews involved. Dealing with potentially dangerous passengers is not something members are trained for. With that said, awareness that situations such as these can and will happen, should be a topic discussed at each station. There are three layers to these incidents as described below:

1) Assessing a situation and risk once arriving on scene.

Attempt to establish any possible threats an individual(s) may pose before taking them on board. Factors may include the time of day, as both incidents mentioned above occurred at night. One was after a fireworks display, which could suggest alcohol as a factor. Ask the individual(s) a series of questions in an attempt to gauge whether they are coherent or under the influence of drugs or alcohol. These questions should also be to determine their state of mind. If they appear agitated or aggressive, it is the coxswain's decision whether or not to take them on board or call for Coast Guard or police assistance.

2) Dealing with a dangerous passenger on board.

If a situation escalates while the passenger(s) are on board and being transferred, the crew will have to assess each situation and do the best they can to diffuse the danger. No two situations will be alike and everything should be done to keep the crew safe. First and foremost, do not attempt to argue or further agitate the passenger(s). Agreeing with them and talking them down, regardless of what must be said, should be paramount. We have been working with the Coast Guard to develop a code for situations such as this where the crew can communicate to MCTS that they are in danger without the passenger(s) becoming aware. If a situation develops where the crew feels they are in a potentially dangerous situation, they are to broadcast to MCTS '**CODE 444**'. This corresponds to the paging code for a safety call. Upon hearing a '**CODE 444**' MCTS will dispatch police to meet the vessel at the dock and/or send additional police or Coast Guard assets to meet the vessel on water. If the coxswain feels additional clarification is needed, they can ask to call MCTS from a cell phone and quietly explain the risk further.

3) Inter-agency communication.

In the second incident mentioned above, RCMP had been looking for the armed man but had not relayed that to Coast Guard. They had not considered that he could have ended up on a shoreline that would have initiated an on-water rescue. As such, this was a learning lesson for all, and Coast Guard and police agencies will attempt to work more closely together going forward.