

Lessons Learned Report 2018-1

Incident:

An RCMSAR Station was tasked by JRCC Victoria to a small vessel in distress with 2 POBs. Vessel was disabled with no lights and was taken under astern tow. It was raining, very dark, with 2'-3' chop and 10-15 kn winds. Due to no nav lights on the distressed vessel, the RCMSAR vessel lit up the towed vessel as best they could with their aft floods (there was a lot a lot of line out due to the conditions).

People on board the distress vessel were asked if they wanted to come aboard the RCMSAR vessel. They said no (they did not want to leave their dogs in the cuddy). The Coxswain did not press the point, since a) they were under the influence of drink or drugs and somewhat belligerent, and b) it was raining and they would have got wet and very cold sitting on the foredeck.

During the tow, a fast vessel with multiple floodlights came straight towards the RCMSAR vessel and tow, passing in the opposite direction at about 3-4 boat lengths. The Coxswain, concerned for the safety of the persons on the stricken vessel and that the approaching vessel might turn behind them and hit the tow, advised the helm turn towards the oncoming vessel by a few degrees to try to protect the vessel under tow. This helped shield the towed vessel but reduced the CPA.

Coxswain was on nav as well as on the phone to JRCC and then RCMP at the time of near miss. There was no spare crew member to go on nav, and Coxswain felt this was acceptable given their low towing speed, location in open waters, and minimal traffic. Oncoming vessel was seen visually at least a mile away due to its powerful floodlights by crew.

The course alteration was successful in avoiding a collision with the tow, and vessel was successfully towed back to and secured at marina and handed over to RCMP.

Issues Surrounding the Incident:

- 1) The vessel being towed did not have and therefore could not exhibit towing lights as required while under tow
- 2) Adequate experienced crew in navigation was not available. Navigation and communications were the responsibility of and being completed by the Coxswain at the same time.
- 3) 2 POBs from vessel in distress remained on their vessel while under tow so as not to be exposed to the elements.

Incident Factors:

There were three main factors that contributed to the incident:

- 1) Communication/navigation - Coxswain was responsible for navigation as well as communications between JRCC and RCMP.
- 2) Not having the victims of the distressed vessel on the RCMSAR boat while undertow increased the sense of urgency which led to the response to alter course towards the oncoming vessel as opposed to away.
- 3) Proper and adequate lighting while towing and under tow - The vessel under tow had no lights whatsoever, and in dark and rainy conditions might not have been visible to oncoming vessels. Strobe light and the use of aft flood-lights may have reduced the night vision on the oncoming vessel to the point where they could not see the RCMSAR strobe/lights.

Lessons to be learned:

- All RCMSAR vessels should have a crew compliment that adequately contributes to all aspects of navigation, communication, helm and leadership. Roles should be specific to the crew and if possible, not shared or performed simultaneously.
- Communications with JRCC/RCMP or others should be delegated to available crew members.
- Coxswain should be aware and cognisant of backscatter from flood lights at night which may affect the ability of other vessel to see the navigation lights of RCMSAR vessel.
- An RCMSAR vessel should always meet the required level of crewing standards for their vessel type, and Coxswains should be aware of and evaluate competencies/experience of crew based on mission they are being tasked for.