M2089

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Category: Superyachts

Report Title Tender capsize when towing inflatable places 4 in lethal danger

Initial Report

A superyacht tender crewed by a driver and a spotter was towing two guests on an inflatable tow. As a ferry passed close by the tender, its wake caused both guests to be thrown off the inflatable. The spotter informed the driver, who turned the tender, but a combination of the fast turn and the ferry's wake caused the tender to flip over. Neither the driver nor the spotter was wearing lifejackets, and the driver was not using a kill cord. Both crew members were thrown clear of the tender.

The driver noticed that the outboard engines were still running and dived under the upturned hull to turn them off. Fuel had leaked, and the area under the hull contained strong petrol fumes, which nearly caused the driver to lose consciousness. The driver also considered the situation a fire risk, isolated the batteries and turned off the engines before escaping from the upturned hull. However, the spotter, who had since gathered the guests onto the inflatable, had to assist the driver, who was struggling due to inhalation of toxic fumes.

The crew members then tried to right the tender but could not do so. They were not carrying any communications equipment, so they could not raise the parent vessel's attention until another vessel passed by (about fifteen minutes after the accident) and radioed the parent vessel.

Unfamiliarity with the equipment onboard meant that it took a further fifteen minutes for the parent vessel to launch a second tender to come to their aid, by which time the guests and crew members had been in the water for thirty minutes. The guests, crew and tender were recovered to the vessel, where the guests were treated for shock. No further medical assistance was required.

Comment

This troubling report raises several 'red flags' about the poor safety culture on board this superyacht. Guests may not be aware of or appreciate the potential dangers of towed inflatables – but the crew should have been, and they should have led by example and worn their lifejackets, used the kill cord, and carried an emergency means of attracting attention. Some kill cords are designed to act as an interlock, so the boat will not start until the kill cord is fitted. UK readers may

remember the ‘Padstow’ incident, where several people
were killed or received life-changing injuries by being run over by their own boat.

The crew must also be aware of their operational limits. Ferries typically follow a set route, so the tender likely passed close to the ferry rather than the other way around, as reported. A ferry operating at speed will produce a large wake and, if not anticipated, can cause towed sports equipment to capsize. The tender must have a spotter to provide adequate warning to mitigate the risks of large wakes and other nearby craft and floating objects.

CHIRP strongly recommends that guests wear a buoyancy aid. Despite some resistance to doing so, if a proper explanation that they are essential safety aids is provided to the guests, then it will be more likely that they will be worn – including with the crotch straps properly in place.

Once the boat had turned over, diving under the hull was also questionable because of the risk of becoming snagged on equipment and drowning. Most engines are gravity fed, and just left alone, the engine would have run out of fuel and stopped very quickly. All fuel lost in an incident has an impact on the environment. The amount lost will be relatively small and will evaporate. However, the loss must be reported.

Key Issues

Overconfidence/Complacency: Not using a kill cord or wearing a lifejacket demonstrates overconfidence – expect the unexpected. CHIRP believes that this should be a mandated requirement within your Safety Management System!

Communication: When operating at range out of sight of the superyacht, it is helpful to have a pre-arranged check in periodicity, e.g., every 20-30 minutes. That way, if you cannot be reached, the parent vessel is alerted to a potential problem. Carrying a means of attracting attention must be a part of every tenders emergency response kit.

Situational awareness: Know where other vessels operate and how their movement or wake will affect your vessel or any towed inflatable. Be ready to move violently when encountering the wake or anticipate that riders might fall off the inflatable.

loss_of_awareness Awareness

poor_communication Communication

complacencyComplacency

normalisation_of_deviation Deviation