



About us

## What we do

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) examines and investigates all types of marine accidents to or on board UK vessels worldwide, and other vessels in UK territorial waters.

As far as the MAIB is concerned, the sole objective of investigating an accident is to determine its circumstances and causes, with the aim of improving the safety of life at sea and the avoidance of accidents in the future. It is not the purpose to apportion liability, nor, except so far as is necessary to achieve the fundamental purpose, to apportion blame.

We do not enforce laws or carry out prosecutions.

## Who we are

Located in offices in Southampton, the MAIB is a separate branch within the Department for Transport (DfT). It is not part of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). The head of the MAIB, the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents, reports directly to the Secretary of State for Transport. It has four teams of accident investigators, each consisting of a principal inspector and four inspectors. All are professionally qualified and experienced in the nautical, engineering, naval architecture and/or fishing disciplines of the marine industry. An administrative staff deals with finance, contracts, records, data analysis and publications, and provides general support to inspectors at all stages of administrative enquiries, preliminary examinations and full investigations.

## Our remit

The powers of MAIB inspectors, and the framework for reporting and investigating accidents, are set out in the Merchant Shipping Act 1995. The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2005 put the framework into effect. These regulations are the foundation of the MAIB's work. They apply to merchant ships, fishing vessels and (with some exceptions) pleasure craft. They define accidents, set out the purpose of investigations and lay down the requirements for reporting accidents. They make provision for the ordering, notification and conduct of investigations, but allow inspectors a good deal of discretion - necessary, given the wide variety of cases. There is a

Memorandum of Understanding between the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the MAIB and the MCA as to which organisation will take the lead in investigations where they share a common interest, particularly at the ship/shore interface. A copy of the Memorandum can be downloaded from the [HSE website](#).



## **An Accident, Major or Serious Injury, or Hazardous Incident?**

### **What is an accident?**

An accident is an undesired event that results in personal injury, damage or loss. Accidents include loss of life or major injury to any person on board, or when a person is lost from a vessel; the actual or presumed loss of a vessel, her abandonment or material damage to her; collision or grounding, disablement, and also material damage caused by a vessel.

An accident can also be an occurrence such as the collapse of lifting gear, an unintended movement of cargo or ballast sufficient to cause a list, a loss of cargo overboard or a snagging of fishing gear which results in the vessel heeling to a dangerous angle, if the occurrence could have caused serious injury or damage to the health of any person. It is the duty of every master or skipper to examine any accident occurring to, or on board, his/her vessel.



### **What is a major injury?**

A major injury includes any fracture to, or loss of, a limb, loss of sight, or any other injury requiring resuscitation or leading to hypothermia or admittance to a hospital or other medical facility for more than 24 hours.

### **What is a serious injury?**

A serious injury is an injury, other than a major injury, when the injured person is incapacitated for more than three consecutive days.

### **What is a hazardous incident?**

A hazardous incident is when an accident nearly occurs in connection with the operation of a vessel. In other words, it is what is often known as a "near miss".



## Reporting requirements

Accidents, including major injuries, must be reported to the MAIB by the quickest possible means. This is so they can be investigated immediately, before vital evidence decays, is removed or is lost.

Serious injuries must be investigated by the vessel's master and owner, and the findings reported to the MAIB within 14 days..

Hazardous incidents don't have to be reported, but the MAIB encourages owners, masters and skippers to report them. Hazardous incidents often teach us lessons that are every bit as relevant as those arising from accidents.

**The MAIB has a special accident reporting line - 023 8023 2527. Outside the UK, call +44 23 8023 2527.**

This line is connected directly to the MAIB offices in Southampton during working hours, and switches automatically to the DfT's duty officer at all other times.

During working hours, reports are collated by the MAIB's support staff and referred to an inspector for a decision on what action to take. In some cases the initial report contains all the information that is needed. In others, the inspector will conduct further enquiries, make a preliminary examination, or complete a full investigation.

Outside working hours, the DfT duty officer passes any reports to the MAIB duty co-ordinator, who decides what action to take.

## The administrative enquiry

In some cases, the ship's owner's or officers' own investigation will be sufficient. However, the MAIB may conduct an administrative enquiry by correspondence and telephone to seek further details on any accident. The Regulations require owners, masters and other relevant people or organisations to provide any such information when requested.

## Preliminary Examination and Full Investigation

Following notification of an accident, inspectors will start to collect evidence and the decision whether or not to conduct a preliminary examination (PE) will be made.

A PE is the first stage of a full investigation, and identifies the causes and circumstances of an accident to see if they meet the criteria required to warrant further investigation and a publicly available report.

If it is decided as a result of the PE that the criteria have not been met, the MAIB will not continue the investigation and all involved parties will be notified.

Every effort is made to examine a wide range of accidents each year.

All PEs and accident investigations seek answers to four basic questions:

- what happened?
- how did it happen?
- why did it happen?
- what can be done to prevent it happening again?

Once the decision to proceed has been made, all available evidence is gathered. No two cases are ever the same, and the process may take different forms. Inspectors will usually wish to see logbooks, charts and other documents. They will invariably interview those who may be able to shed light on what happened and are likely to take photographs and examine computer records. If the vessel contains a 'black box', the data will be removed and examined.

Inspectors consider evidence from as many sources as possible. If necessary, they will call in technical experts from outside the Branch. The MAIB places particular emphasis on identifying human factors in the causes of an accident.

Sometimes the MAIB will use divers or remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) on the seabed to carry out a detailed examination of a wreck. Obviously, an underwater survey is only an option once a wreck has been pinpointed, which is not always possible. The MAIB is not responsible for recovering bodies.

In very general terms, it can take seven months to a year to complete an investigation and publish a report. At first sight this might seem a long time, but it may be necessary to interview a wide range of individuals, cross-check evidence, examine suspect equipment and consult with technical experts. Often the true cause of an accident turns out to be very different from the convenient solution identified by people who are not accident investigators.

A full investigation or PE is entirely independent of any enquiries made by the police or other authority collecting evidence for a possible prosecution.

## Reports

The MAIB aims to improve safety for all those who work at, or travel by, sea. The MAIB's investigation findings almost always lead to recommendations aimed at preventing similar accidents.

If a decision has been made to fully investigate an accident, the MAIB will make the results publicly available in a full report.

The accident investigation report is not written with liability in mind and is not intended to be used in court for the purpose of litigation. It endeavours to identify and analyse the relevant safety issues pertaining to the specific accident, and to make recommendations aimed at preventing similar accidents in the future.

Three times each year, the MAIB produces a Safety Digest - a collection of short, anonymous reports on the lessons learned from examinations and investigations.

From time to time, the Chief Inspector may publish a report highlighting specific safety problems, safety trends, or any other issues he feels should be brought to the attention of the maritime community and the public. An annual report outlining the uptake of safety recommendations first appeared in 2006.

The MAIB produces an Annual Report which describes what the Branch has done over the past year.

All these publications are available free of charge from the MAIB and are also on the MAIB website.

## Statistics

The MAIB maintains a computerised database of reportable marine accidents which have occurred since 1991. Besides providing an accessible source of information, the database can be analysed to identify accident trends.

Accident statistics are set out in the MAIB's Annual Report.

## Education and training

The MAIB helps to educate seafarers by presenting its findings to maritime colleges and mariners.

## Families

The MAIB is very conscious of the hurt and bewilderment that a marine accident causes to the families of victims. Inspectors make every effort to contact next of kin after an accident to explain the MAIB's role. Once our investigation is complete, we give the next of kin our conclusions before we make them publicly available.

## Contact details

For further information about the MAIB or for information about specific accidents, contact the MAIB at the address below:

Marine Accident Investigation Branch  
Mountbatten House  
Grosvenor Square  
Southampton SO15 2JU

Telephone 023 8039 5500  
Fax 023 8023 2459  
e-mail [maib@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:maib@dft.gsi.gov.uk)

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