



Entrapment!

We take a look at the impact 'safety boat' courses can have on saving lives

As part of its regular monitoring of incidents, accidents and near misses in all British-water-based activities, the RYA continues to look closely at the frequency and impact of entrapments in small sailing craft.

The RYA training team has observed several consistent factors in some of the incidents that the RYA has investigated. This news will be of particular interest to club officials with responsibility for the safety of racing and training fleets.

Everyone knows that there is a risk of entrapment when a dinghy capsizes. Avoidance techniques and rescue procedures are many and varied, but there are two recurring themes. Firstly, in a training situation, the use of a masthead float would, in most situations, prevent

complete inversion. The fact that an entangled crew member's head would be close to or on the surface would allow them to at least take a breath and buy some time whilst others try to free them.

Secondly, if a dinghy needs to be righted, the method of two people on the upturned hull applying leverage to the centreboard will bring the dinghy to 90 degrees as quickly as any other method.

Sadly, entrapments continue to occur, occasionally with fatal results. But there are some encouraging signs, as illustrated by this case study.



Entrapment can be avoided with the right training

Case study

A day boat was being raced in a regatta, helmed by a disabled man with a crew of three experienced sailors. During a downwind leg, the boat inadvertently gybed and inverted. The helmsman was trapped beneath the hull. The situation was exacerbated by a modification to the boat and the fact that the helmsman was wearing an automatically inflated lifejacket.

The day boat crew and the crew of the attending RIB made brave attempts to reach the trapped sailor, but only once the RIB's crew were they able to reach the helmsman, who by then had stopped breathing. Fortunately, due to prompt

first aid, he began to breathe again and made a full recovery in hospital.

Investigation after the event revealed that the crew of the RIB had been on an RYA Safety Boat course and had received training on how to right inverted dinghies – a significant factor in this case.

The RYA Safety Boat course teaches useful skills for all boat drivers who may find themselves offering support or safety cover for fleets. The RYA encourages all those working in a support capacity for clubs or training centres to consider attending this popular and useful course, and to make full use of the opportunities to practise techniques that the exercises in the course provide.

Useful reading

David Ritchie, ex-RYA national coach, carried out an investigation into entrapments and came up with some interesting findings and solutions. You can download a copy of his report from the RYA website.