URGENT SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

FLYER TO THE YACHTING INDUSTRY (02/2026)

Capsize leading to a loss of life





Following an investigation carried out by the Maritime Authority of the Cayman Islands (MACI), the Authority is keen to raise awareness of the risks of large yacht tenders operating independently from their mothership. The full investigation report will be published shortly, but this Safety Flyer is intended to highlight the main safety lessons arising from the investigation.

An open boat chase tender to a large yacht, crewed by two experienced yacht personnel, was making an extended repositioning voyage to rendezvous with its mothership. During the voyage, it encountered adverse weather and capsized for reasons that remain unexplained.

The tender's skipper was lost overboard, while the second crew member escaped from the capsized vessel, reached a secure position on its upturned hull, and was later rescued by another vessel. Sadly, the skipper was unable to reach safety on the capsized vessel and following a search-and-rescue operation, was later found deceased due to drowning.

Safety Lessons

(1) Although the tender in question was designed to operate at high speed, the vessel was forced to operate at slow speeds due to the prevailing conditions. The exact cause of the capsize is currently unknown, although the surviving crew member recalls some violent movement of the vessel immediately before the capsize. The Authority therefore encourages stakeholder engagement to gain further insight into the operational performance and stability characteristics of high-speed tenders, particularly when operating at lower speeds.

(2) The incident also highlights the need to ensure that essential safety measures are in place when undertaking such voyages, such as the donning of lifejackets, ensuring kill chords are always worn while underway and the provision of Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) to aid search and rescue operations. All safety measures should be fully considered and addressed in a risk assessment and this is of particular importance when the tender is operated independently of the mothership. Operators should also encourage the use of 'toolbox' meetings prior to undertaking such voyages to ensure identified risks are mitigated.

(3) Operators are encouraged to ensure that crew operating such tenders are appropriately trained and qualified to operate very high-powered tenders. Although it is very common for operators to hold deck qualifications issued under the provisions of STCW, or national qualifications for rigid inflatable boats, this may not adequately prepare the individuals to operate a very high-powered tender in a seaway, particularly in respect to the specific operating characteristics of such craft. The RYA courses intended for the operation of high-speed powerboats in all conditions should be considered as a reference standard.

(4) All crew should be familiarized with the manufacturer's operating manuals before undertaking such voyages to gain a better insight as to the performance characteristics of the vessel and how to safely operate the tender in all expected operational conditions.

(5) Operators are also encouraged to monitor the hours of rest for tender operators both in the period leading up to, and during the passage. The effects of fatigue may be exacerbated by long periods underway, especially in adverse weather conditions, and is well known to have an impact on reaction times, decision-making abilities, and vigilance.

Summary of Findings

(1) Engagement with relevant stakeholders to gain further insight into very high-speed powerboat stability and operational performance, particularly at lower speeds.

(2) Issue a Safety Alert to owners and operators of tenders and chase boats designed to encourage them to ensure that key safety measures, especially the wearing of lifejackets, connecting of kill cords and carriage of PLBs are adhered to.

(3) Provide guidance to owners and operators on suitable training and qualifications for seafarers when operating very high-speed powerboats.

(4) Official operating manuals shall be obtained from the vessel's manufacturer to provide more comprehensive information to its crews on the safe operation of these vessels.

(5) Ensure operators fully consider the effects of fatigue on operators of chase tenders, particularly on extended duration passages.

Maritime Authority of the Cayman Islands 12 November 2026.