

## **Info Log – November 2012**

### **Another injury from a rescue boat**

#### The issue

During an improvised rafting session an instructor was driving a launch towards a group to collect them from the raft/water. The launch was an open, heavy displacement vessel fitted with an inboard diesel engine. Whilst at present it remains unclear exactly how, a young person in the group became entangled in the propeller. The child received significant injuries to the lower leg and was trapped for approximately 40 minutes whilst instructors and, later, members of the fire brigade tried to release him. Having done so the child was then taken by air ambulance to hospital.

The launch had, in the week prior to the incident, been fitted with new engine controls. The new system differed considerably from that which had been in place previously and was located on the stern bulkhead, behind the driver and below the tiller. It was a combined system controlling both throttle and gears. Previously a gear lever and separate means of throttle control extended from the engine box in front of the driver. In the original system both gear and throttle levers were mounted such that to engage forward gear you moved the lever forward (towards the front of the boat), to go astern you moved it backwards (towards the back of the boat) with neutral in between. The new system operated across the boat, moving the lever to port engaged forward gear and to starboard astern.

An investigation by an environmental health officer is ongoing in its attempts to establish how the accident could have been prevented.

#### The Outcome

The positioning of controls is significant in their subsequent ease of use.

New control systems, and especially those that differ from previously understood and used versions, can create additional issues for helms. This is perhaps particularly relevant when individuals may have become very familiar with the previous system over an extended period.

Changes in control systems can result in changes to a vessel operating characteristics and a review of a boat's role and additional training for helms may, as a result, be required.

The characteristics of individual vessels in terms of their maneuverability, the 'way' carried when taken out of gear and the visibility from the helming position, should be considered in light of the intended use of the vessel and practised in some form of scenario based training.