

# **Fatal Accident During Training for Dragon Boat Race Outside the Aberdeen Typhoon Shelter on 4 May 2003**

## **A. The incident**

1. During training for Dragon Boat Race outside the Aberdeen Typhoon Shelter at about 1615 on 4 May 2003, a dragon boat encountered a large swell on the starboard side and capsized, throwing all persons on board into the waters. One of the paddlers was found missing after the incident. He was subsequently found at about 2000 in the vicinity and was certified dead after admitted to hospital.

## **B. Findings**

1. The training was conducted outside the breakwaters of the Typhoon Shelter which is more exposed to weather (Fig. 1). The Dragon Boat could be affected by swells from the open sea or caused by the passing of large vessels.
2. Dragon boat is a traditional wooden rowing boat built for racing purposes with a long and slender configuration. It is not designed with sufficient stability to withstand adverse sea conditions or unbalanced sitting arrangements. Therefore, dragon boat is vulnerable to capsize, even in sheltered waters.
3. The swell approached unexpectedly and the Dragon boat capsized almost immediately. The situation appeared quite chaotic and most of the paddlers were trying to hold onto the Dragon Boat from one side, causing it to roll over again and again.
4. Other paddlers had neither paid particular attention to the deceased, nor noticed that he had gone missing at that moment.
5. The cause of death of the deceased appears to be drowning.

## **C. Lessons**

1. Consideration must be given to the choice of training locations, taking into account the exposure of the location to weather condition and availability of any assistance in case of emergency, including the use of a standby vessel with appropriate communication facilities to provide immediate assistance to competitors.

2. It is important to remain calm and organized if Dragon Boat capsizes. Panic could spread between members of the team and could lead to rapid exhaustion, thus inhibiting one's ability to remain afloat. Practical capsize drills can improve the experience of dragon boat teams in handling such emergencies.
3. A safety guideline should be prepared to enhance the safety of dragon boat activities, in particular during training. Such guideline should address the following aspects:
  - a. swimming ability and fitness of the competitors;
  - b. proper leadership and communication within a team;
  - c. awareness of sea and traffic conditions;
  - d. procedures in case of capsizing and man overboard;
  - e. partnership between team members for mutual assistance in case of emergency, if deemed appropriate.

Fig. 1 The location of the incident

