

Dealing with a major incident

It is every principal's nightmare to experience a major incident at their centre. Thankfully this is very rare at RYA centres, but if you are ever unfortunate enough to be involved in one, you need to know how to handle the unfolding events.

Your first priority is, of course, the safety of participants and instructors. However, once ashore you need a strategy to deal with the authorities and the press.

- Get a statement from competent witnesses ;
- Remove the instructor and key witnesses from the centre to somewhere you can talk to them away from the press;
- Produce a written statement for the press, such as:

*" **** sailing school regrets to announce the death of a crew member who fell overboard at night from a training yacht. When and where. Our deepest sympathy to the relatives etc. A full statement will be issued at 2pm tomorrow" (give yourself time to collate the information).*

- Don't hold a press conference, but decide who will speak to the press;
- Don't allow well meaning but ill informed staff to make public comments;
- Try to keep a record of whom you have spoken to, who has contacted you etc;
- Inform RYA Training (023 8060 4180) who can assist with compiling your statement to the press;
- If the rescue services have been involved the press will have probably obtained some information from them;
- If there has been a fatality the police will contact the centre and inform the next of kin. Do not publicise the name of the casualty until you know this has been done, even if the press appear to know who it is;
- If your boat has a code of practice certificate you must inform the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) within 24 hours. You can do this by phoning 023 8039 5500. They will inform you within 28 days whether they intend to investigate;
- Keep any relevant equipment such as lifejackets, logbooks etc
- If required, send a report to the MAIB (refer to booklet G27).

When dealing with any major incident, it helps if:

- your paperwork is up to date with information such as contact numbers for the next of kin;
- your boats and instructors comply with your own safety policy and the RYA's conditions of recognition.