

In very general terms, it takes about seven months to a year to complete an investigation and publish a report. At first sight this might seem a long time, but it may be necessary to interview a wide range of individuals, crosscheck evidence, examine equipment and consult with technical experts. Often the true cause of an accident turns out to be very different from the convenient solution identified by people who are not accident investigators in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy.

THE INVESTIGATION REPORT

All MAIB investigation reports are produced in-house, and are publicly available, free of charge, to anyone who asks. The final report can also be read and downloaded from the MAIB's website.

Because reports may contain something likely to adversely affect someone's reputation, the Chief Inspector is required by law to send a draft to those concerned, so they have the opportunity to correct any factual errors before it is made publicly available. This consultation process can take as long as two months.

The next of kin of anyone who has died in a marine accident will be sent a copy of the final report unless they indicate otherwise.

MAIB accident reports can also be presented at coroner's inquests and fatal accident inquiries.

Brief summaries of accident reports, including those that have not been fully investigated, may be included in the MAIB's Safety Digest, which is published three times a year.

One of the tragedies of accidents at sea is that in some cases the exact cause will never be known. In such circumstances, the MAIB may still conclude that valuable lessons can be learned, and will make recommendations accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The MAIB's staff is acutely aware of the distress caused by the death of a close relation in a marine accident, and assures all next of kin that any investigation will be as thorough and as quick as possible.

HELP AND ADVICE

The following organisations can offer advice and support to next of kin:

- Seafarers Support
Tel: 0800 1214765
- Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen
Tel: 01489 566 910
- Mission to Seafarers
Tel: 020 7248 5202
- Shipwrecked Mariners Society
Tel: 01243 787761
- Stella Maris
Tel: 0207 588 8285
- Sailors' Society
Tel: 023 8051 5950
- Liverpool Seafarers Centre
Tel: 0300 800 8080
- Cruse Bereavement Care
Tel: 0844 477 9400

For further information about the MAIB or for information about specific accidents, contact the MAIB at the address below:

Marine Accident Investigation Branch
Mountbatten House, Grosvenor Square
Southampton SO15 2JU

Telephone: 023 8039 5500
Fax: 023 8023 2459
E-mail: maib@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Information is also available by visiting the MAIB website home page at:

www.maib.gov.uk

MAIB
MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

Fatal Marine Accidents Information for Relatives

Any accident at sea or in harbour involving loss of life results in pain and suffering. The survivors, the families and the community endure grief, loss and confusion. They will have many questions, and will want to know "what happened?" and "why?"

Whenever a marine accident occurs it seems as if many official bodies converge on the scene to find out what happened. The police, government officials, lawyers, insurance assessors and marine surveyors will all be asking similar questions, albeit from different perspectives. This often appears confusing to families and friends.

This leaflet explains how and when marine accidents are investigated in the United Kingdom and on UK registered vessels. It also attempts to answer many common questions.

THE MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

The United Kingdom Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) is based in Southampton and is an independent part of the Department for Transport. The MAIB investigates all types of marine accidents, both to ships and to people on board them. The sole objective of any MAIB investigation is the prevention of future marine accidents through the ascertainment of the causes and circumstances of an accident.

The MAIB does not apportion blame or liability. The MAIB is **not** a regulatory or prosecuting authority and cannot enforce its recommendations.

The MAIB attaches the greatest importance to keeping next of kin informed about the known facts of an investigation. They are, therefore, always welcome to talk to those conducting the investigation at any time, to learn of its progress. Whenever possible, arrangements will be made to provide the close family with a private brief about the accident, before any report is made publicly available.

WHEN AN ACCIDENT OCCURS

When there has been an accident, the owner, along with the master or skipper of the vessel are required to report it to the MAIB as quickly as possible.

The authorities make every effort to inform families about an accident before they hear of it on the radio or television but, with the speed of modern communications, this is not always possible.

The actual responsibility for notifying the next of kin of anyone killed will usually fall to the police, but others, such as ordained ministers, staff of a fishermen's or seafarers' mission, doctors or close relatives, will often break the news first.

Following the receipt of a report of an accident, the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents will use likely future safety issues as the basis for deciding which of the following courses of action to pursue:

- not to investigate in any way
- to conduct an administrative enquiry
- to make a preliminary examination
- to complete a full investigation

Once the decision has been made to investigate, one or more MAIB inspectors will be appointed. They are highly qualified and are drawn from the nautical, marine engineering, naval architecture and fishing disciplines. All are highly trained and competent to investigate marine accidents of any nature. An administrative staff deals with records, data analysis and publications, and provides general support.

If a vessel is lost at sea, the MAIB's task is to find out why. If the wreck is found, an underwater survey of it may be undertaken. In exceptional cases, the decision will be taken to raise it. The inspector involved will endeavour to inform the next of kin before the intentions are made public.

Sometimes, missing or sunken vessels prove impossible to find.

The MAIB is not responsible for recovering bodies, nor for the marking, raising or removal of the wreck.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE ENQUIRY

In some cases the ship's owner's or officers' own investigation will be sufficient. However, the MAIB may conduct an administrative enquiry by correspondence or telephone to seek further details on any accident. The Regulations require owners, masters and other relevant people or organisations to provide any such information when requested.

THE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

The preliminary examination is the first stage of a full investigation. Its purpose is to identify the causes and circumstances of an accident to see if it meets the criteria required to warrant further investigation culminating in a publicly available report.

If it is decided as a result of the PE that the criteria have not been met, the MAIB will not continue an investigation. This decision will normally be made within two weeks of the accident, and all involved parties will be notified.

THE FULL INVESTIGATION

All accident investigations seek answers to four basic questions:

- what happened?
- how did it happen?
- why did it happen?
- what can be done to prevent it happening again?

Once a report of an accident has been received and the decision to investigate taken, the inspectors will start to collect evidence. No two investigations are ever the same, and the process may take different forms. Inspectors will usually wish to see logbooks, charts and other documents. They will invariably interview those who may be able to shed light on what happened and are likely to take photographs and examine computer records. If the vessel contains a 'black box', the data will be removed and examined.

Sometimes the inspector needs to talk to the next of kin to learn about the background of a victim, or to look at professional documents or certificates which might be kept at home. This will never be easy for either side, but the inspector will always contact the family before visiting. Such meetings also allow the next of kin to meet the inspector personally and question him about the handling and progress of the investigation.