

Incidents So Far This Year

In a lot of situations, our main activity is to keep a casualty vessel under observation, pass details and updates to the Coastguard, and be there to notice in case things should go from bad to worse. One of our Watchkeepers – a keen sailor – recently wrote about the reassurance that she felt knowing that someone was keeping an eye out....

As a Gosport NCI Watchkeeper I know the routine of keeping a watch – being the eyes and ears along the coast. I am also aware that whilst we all work to a common understanding and methods not all stations have the same volume of activity as we do at Gosport NCI.

Recently I have been sailing in waters unfamiliar to me – from Gosport towards the Netherlands and return - via Dover. On the way to the Netherlands we sailed through strong NE winds (Force 5 to 6) in moderately rough seas. It was very reassuring to know that I had some fellow watchkeepers along the coast watching me and knew that help would be there if we needed it. With those powerful binoculars they would be looking out the window and would know that we were out there.

In a lot of incidents the casualty may have no idea that we are keeping a watch on them, but where they do we hope that it gives them the same sense of reassurance.

Reviewing the incidents that Watchkeepers at NCI Gosport have logged so far, we note that there is a total of 19, which is more than double the average for NCI stations nationally, reflecting just how much leisure sailing takes place in this part of the Solent. Bear in mind that for every officially logged incident, there were numerous other occasions where Watchkeepers kept a careful eye on other people or vessels that gave them concern - such as the swimmer who went out just a bit too far, or the boat getting too close to a larger vessel – but where happily a bigger problem did not develop.

Let's start with some false alarms. There were five occasions where emergency beacon activations were detected, but which turned out to be accidental or a test which had not been notified to the Coastguard. Four of these were SART alarms and one was an DSC activation. Minor issues these may be, but they all took up the valuable time of Coastguard personnel (and NCI Watchkeepers), and in one case caused the issuing of a Mayday Relay and a lifeboat launch.

It is a good idea to test these devices periodically, but do please notify the Coastguard that you are doing it. Otherwise do keep your hands off those switches and buttons ! Dealing with your false alarm could delay answering a real distress call.

Pan Pan calls were heard on five occasions from vessels – both yachts and motor vessels - with engine failures. On two occasions the vessel was towed back by a lifeboat, and on another the tow was provided by a second vessel. On another occasion the vessel managed to

restart the engine, and on yet another the vessel sailed back to harbour and was met by a marina tender. Our records only note that one of these vessels put down an anchor to stop themselves drifting... generally it's a good idea to do this if you can as you never know where you might drift to.

Pan Pan was also heard from a sailing vessel that had lost its hydraulics; this one was towed into harbour by a second vessel.

A more 'grave and imminent' situation resulting in a ***Mayday*** call came from a motor vessel that had smoke coming from its engine compartment. Although the vessel was fairly close to our lookout station it was initially hard to identify amongst the other boats in and near the Small Boat Channel [this caused the writing of an earlier article, if you care to look back in the blog]. In any case, the Gafirs lifeboat was immediately tasked and caught up with the Mayday vessel near 4-Bar buoy. The vessel was made safe and towed into the Camber.

Groundings.

Unlike last year, where there seemed to be a huge number of groundings, NCI Gosport only logged three groundings so far this year. In all three cases the boat was in no real danger; in two cases the skippers just waited for the tide to float them and in the third (which was in the upper part of the harbour) the skipper was assisted by Sea Start. Unfortunately this skipper neglected to tell KHM that he was free, so we did it for him.

We logged two ***Man Overboard*** events in the last six months. One was in the harbour, close to Camber pile, and started out as a rib having a loss of engine power. A second rib went to assist, and somehow in the middle of that someone went overboard. Happily he or she was picked up by a pilot vessel that happened to be nearby.

The other Man Overboard resulted from the capsize of a rowing boat that put two people in the water. This resulted in a Mayday Relay by the Coastguard, and attendance by an incoming vessel, a Police launch, and also a lifeboat. Luckily, there were no fatalities, but watchkeepers were concerned to note that no-one was wearing a lifejacket.

The last two incidents that were logged by NCI Gosport both resulted from the Coastguard contacting us to look out for something. The first was to ask us if we had a visual on an inflatable with 6 persons on board; presumably a member of the public had seen something alarming or thought it was overloaded. Unfortunately we did not see it from the Gosport station, but it is possible that another NCI station got sight of it.

The final incident was a call from the Coastguard asking if we could see a paddleboarder clinging to the structure marking the passage through the submarine barrier. A passing yacht had caught sight of him there and called the Coastguard thinking he may be in trouble. We were able to tell the Coastguard that we could indeed see the paddleboarder, but then subsequently lost sight as he paddled away. An RNLI lifeboat caught up with him in Langstone harbour to confirm that he was OK.