

Exercise Guardian, Shetland, 2013.

AIMS OF THE EXERCISE

Primary aim of exercise is to carry out end to end test of MOB G system.

SECONDARY AIMS

To give RNLI crew and HMCG first hand experience of MOB G.

To provide SAR experience to crew under training.

To assess communications.

Participants

Lerwick Lifeboat
Shetland Coastguard
RNLI Ops Room
FV Lianne, Skipper Willie Jamieson
Rodney Smith
John Fulton RNLI, FSC.

The exercise was arranged after discussions with the Lerwick lifeboat crew, Rodney Smith and myself John Fulton.

Rodney is the brother of Neil Smith a local fisherman who was lost overboard from his vessel the "Breadwinner" in January 2011.

I attended a meeting in Lerwick on October 2012. Present at the meeting were the MAIB, MCA, HMCG, Fishermens Mission, Police, Lerwick Lifeboat coxswain Bruce Leitch, Rodney Smith, Alistair Carmichael MP for Orkney and Shetland and John Fulton RNLI FSC, the meeting was to identify anything that could or should have been done better by all involved when Neil was lost from the "Breadwinner", also what areas to look at to prevent a fisherman going overboard, and if they did go overboard what would help them to survive.

After the meeting the Lerwick crew, Rodney and I discussed the Mob G system and its benefits.

Background about MOB Guardian: The RNLI's original concept for MOB Guardian came about to help improve safety in the fishing industry and save lives. Fishing is generally considered one of the most dangerous industries in the world – and in the UK there are up to 20 deaths in the industry every year.

The RNLI also noted there was less legislation for the carriage of safety equipment on fishing vessels under 15m in length compared with much larger vessels.

The MOB Guardian system, which has been developed by the RNLI for fishermen, gives an early alert to an emergency, helps reduce search time, and provides the rescuers with an up to date position for the troubled vessel or man overboard. It means search and rescue agencies including RNLI volunteer crews on lifeboats don't have to start a search with little or no information about the location of the casualty. If a single-handed fisherman falls over the side of their vessel the system will automatically alert search and rescue agencies and can also shut down the engine to stop the fishing boat.

Fishermen also wear a Personal Safety Device (PSD) incorporating a panic button, so should a crew member become ill or caught in machinery, they can easily request help.

MOB Guardian is the only system that provides safety cover for both the vessel and individual crew members. As soon as a fishing vessel goes to sea, the MOB Guardian system connects with the RNLI Operations Room. However, it is a confidential system, so location information about a particular vessel is not available publicly.

The system was officially introduced onto the market in December 2007, and within eight months, saved the lives of five fishermen. To date more than 500 fishing vessels are fitted with the MOB Guardian unit.

How MOB Guardian works: MOB Guardian consists of a base unit, which is situated in the wheelhouse and personal safety devices (PSDs) worn by the fishermen. The base unit automatically transmits, via satellite, regular updates of a vessel's position, course and speed to the RNLI's monitoring station. If a regular update is missed, the monitoring station tries to regain contact with the boat and if no further updates are received an alert is raised with the RNLI, which is then passed to the Coastguard so that a search can be initiated. (An emergency alert button on the base unit can also be activated manually to send an alert to the RNLI).

If a fisherman wearing a PSD falls into the water, or activates the PSD manually, by pressing and holding down the button for 5 seconds, an alert is raised and transmitted to the RNLI operations centre. The information is then passed to the search and rescue agencies meaning they now have accurate and up to date information on the situation. Many fishermen work alone, but if other fishermen are on board they will be made aware of the situation by an audible alarm that is sounded on board when a fisherman falls overboard.

Searching for a missing vessel or crew member becomes far easier and casualties can be reached sooner therefore increasing their chances of survival.

Mob Guardian stopped being sold by the RNLI in March 2012. However the RNLI will continue to monitor all vessels fitted with the system until at least March 2017.

Technological developments in marine PLBs is moving at a tremendous rate and there are good affordable and reliable products on the market to choose from.

We also discussed the benefits of wearing a PFD or lifejacket, which became plain to see when conducting the exercise.

We have recognised that MOB G, PLBs, AIS will alert us that you are in the water and give us your position. SAR will do what is required to recover you, but what will you do? From

the moment you enter the water until you are recovered from the water, it is your responsibility to be afloat and alive when we get to you. We require your collaboration to ensure the best outcome possible.

So, you can help yourself by wearing a lifejacket or PFD. Realistically could you swim or tread water until recovered without one?

The exercise we conducted showed that if a person in the water was wearing a lifejacket or PFD there was every chance that they could have survived until the lifeboat or other vessels arrived on scene.

The RNLI fishing safety team are working with the SFF to rollout free lifejackets to fishermen in Scotland. We will be advising fishermen on the benefits of wearing a lifejacket and how to maintain and look after them.

I would like to thank all involved in the exercise, but in particular to Rodney Smith for his help from start to finish. Willie John Jamieson for his time and knowledge, and the use of "Lianne" and the Lerwick lifeboat crew.

Exercise Guardian Timeline

8th June 2013

09.50 hrs - MFV Lianne departs Symbister harbour

10.22 hrs - MFV Lianne arrives at Datum

10.25 hrs – Manikin overboard with MOB Guardian PSD attached 10.5 Miles from Lerwick

10.27 hrs - Alarm on MOB Guardian base unit in Lianne wheelhouse activated

10.29 hrs - Watch officer in RNLI ops room at Poole contacts Lianne Skipper Willie Jamieson to verify emergency

10.33 hrs - RNLI informs Shetland Coastguard of man overboard incident from Lianne

10.38 hrs – Shetland Coastguard requests launch of Lerwick lifeboat - crew paged

10.48 hrs – Lerwick lifeboat launch

11.00 hrs Exercise Guardian Datum weather on scene N sea calm

11.16 hrs- Lerwick ALB on scene.

11.27 hrs – Manikin recovered from sea

11.36 hrs - Exercise Guardian Terminated, Lerwick lifeboat returns to base.