



SURF LIFE SAVING®
NEW ZEALAND

Sharing of Lessons Learnt from a Review of a Surf Life Saving Accident or Incident

Lived it – Learnt from it

Accident Name

IRB Driver Training mishap

Accident Date

December 2023

Location

Eastern Region

Description of the accident/incident

During a midweek training session at an Eastern Region Surf Life Saving Club, the crew was engaged in IRB Crewperson and Driver Training.

On the beach, a trainee IRB Instructor (and qualified Driver) and a trainee IRB Driver were conducting solo driving rotations in the IRB. After approximately 10 – 15 minutes of driving, the trainee driver ventured about 600 meters offshore. Intending to perform a restart procedure, the trainee shut down the motor. However, during the restart attempt, the trainee inadvertently left the motor in gear. As the trainee started the motor, the IRB unexpectedly surged forward due to the engaged gear and wind, causing the trainee to fall out of the IRB. Subsequently, the IRB continued further out to sea while the trainee driver attempted to swim after it, covering approximately 900 meters in an unsuccessful effort to locate the drifting IRB, which eventually travelled approximately 1.5 km out to sea.

During this ordeal, the trainee driver signalled for assistance, unsure if observed by fellow Surf Lifeguards on the shore, who fortunately did notice. However, due to the ongoing rebuilding stage of the SLSC and the dispersed storage of gear, a second IRB was not readily available, resulting in a 45-minute delay in locating, preparing, and responding with a Rescue IRB.

Once back on shore, the immediate focus was on warming up the trainee driver and then washing down the boats. The following day, the IRB underwent inspection by a local mechanic, revealing a malfunction in the throttle return mechanism, which was not functioning at full capacity.

Outcome

The final outcome was that the trainee driver unfortunately missed selection for the New Zealand Olympic Swim Team.

The IRB throttle mechanism was repaired at the local service center and adjusted to ensure it became fully operational again.

SLSNZ and Maritime NZ maintained ongoing communication about this incident for several weeks to ensure both agencies were comfortable.

Causes (Immediate, Underlying, Root Cause)

As with many incidents and accidents, there are often a number of factors that occur before, during, and after an incident that contribute to the outcome.

SLSNZ has identified several findings from this incident:

- The SLSC conducted this training without appropriately qualified instructors.
- Although the trainee driver reported checking the throttle return mechanism, he also acknowledged it was not functioning correctly during the pre-use procedure. The motor was still used; however, it should have been removed from operation and clearly marked as non-operational.
- SLSNZ also requires a second IRB to be ready when any IRB training is carried out. The Training NSOP was not followed.
- The trainee IRB driver reported being 600m offshore while operating the IRB solo. However, SLSNZ does not endorse solo driving practices. Instead, the focus has shifted towards implementing safe procedures for crew retrieval if they fall out of the IRB, or simply ensuring a safe return to shore.

Relevant Photo's



Lessons Learned

- When we deviate from normal Standing Operating Procedures, we are more likely to encounter challenges.
- Not withdrawing equipment once it is found to be not fully operational. (This motor should have been tagged and clearly identified as non-operational until it had been checked and repaired).
- Not following our training NSOPs around Instructors.
- We do not need to go a long way offshore at any time during training.

Corrective Actions and suggestions moving forwards

- SLSNZ has worked with Maritime New Zealand on this incident, and it will be shared through our reporting with membership on incidents and accidents.
- This incident will also be shared with our IRB Instructors through our 2024/2025 Online Refreshers.

We are about continuous improvement and a no-blame culture, Surf Life Saving New Zealand's plan is to share learnings and decision making examples from actual incidents and accidents that our members have experienced, with the goal of avoiding avoidable accidents