

IAATO Update
Incident involving the M/S *Explorer*
26 November 2007
1500 hrs GMT

The Vessel M/S *Explorer*

At 03:20 GMT M/S *Explorer* issued a distress call from position 62° 23' 32" S, 57° 16' 09" W Bransfield Strait. The vessel was in 500 meters of water but was drifting due to wind and weather. Reports indicate that she was holed by ice on the starboard side. The M/S *Explorer* is operated by IAATO member G.A.P Adventures. After initial attempts to contain the damage, the order was given to abandon ship. The ship's entire complement of 91 passengers, 54 crew and 9 staff (154 in total) were evacuated safely to the ship's lifeboats and Zodiacs.

Three IAATO vessels, M/V *National Geographic Endeavour*, M/V *Nordnorge*, and M/V *Antarctic Dream*, were approximately 40 miles away and closest to M/S *Explorer*. They were contacted immediately and proceeded towards the scene. The M/V *National Geographic Endeavour* and M/V *Nordnorge* both arrived on the scene within a few hours. Passengers, staff and some crew waited in lifeboats for a period of 4-5 hours. The M/V *Nordnorge* provided the initial command response control centre. All M/S *Explorer* personnel were subsequently transferred to the M/V *Nordnorge* by 0730 local time on November 23.

The officers, staff and crew of the M/S *Explorer* are to be commended for their handling of the evacuation of the ship in a timely, professional and effective manner. It is impressive to note that there was no physical harm to any of the passengers, staff and crew, and the overall handling of the situation was well done from all reports received by IAATO.

The work of Captain Arvid Hansen, the officers, staff and crew of M/V *Nordnorge*, and the Hurtigruten ground staff, Captain Oliver Kruess and the officers, staff and crew of M/V *National Geographic Endeavour* and *Lindblad Expeditions*, has been outstanding with regard to their professionalism, speed and efficiency of their response to the emergency.

The passenger and staff nationalities included: 2 Argentines, 10 Australians, 2 Belgians, 24 British, 12 Canadians, 1 Chinese, 3 Danes, 17 Dutch, 1 French, 1 German, 2 Hong Kong, 4 Irish, 1 Japanese, 4 Swiss, 14 Americans, 1 Colombian and 1 Swede. The captain of the ship is Swedish and the majority of the crew consisted of 45 Filipinos, 3 Swedes, 2 Bulgarians, 2 New Zealanders, and 1 Pole.

The M/V *Nordnorge* proceeded to Maxwell Bay, King George Island, where all of the *Explorer's* passengers, staff and crew disembarked by 2200 hrs local time on November 23.

The Chilean and Uruguayan governments kindly granted permission and assistance for all passengers, staff and crew to stay overnight on November 23 and, if necessary, the 24th at both Frei/Teniente Marsh and Artigas Stations. A Chilean aircraft was chartered by G.A.P. and used to fly a group of 77 passengers and 2 crew who arrived in Punta Arenas on November 24. The remaining group flew on November 25. Due to weather conditions it was not possible to fly all personnel on the 24th. G.A.P. had established a substantial assistance program in Punta Arenas when the personnel from the ship arrived. Accommodations have been arranged in Punta Arenas and flights home from there are currently being scheduled. Questionnaires were distributed to the passengers as to what their wishes were in terms of their travel arrangements. In addition to the ship's doctor, one additional doctor and counsellor were also available to treat the passengers should that be required. All passports were removed from the ship and passengers were in

possession of their own passports. Several embassies have provided representatives in Punta Arenas for further assistance.

National Program Vessel and Helicopter Assistance

Although not reported officially to IAATO, we understand that the Brazilian vessel, R/V *Ary Ronge* proceeded to the area to recover the lifeboats initially, and Chilean vessel I/B *Oscar Viel* proceeded to the scene to assist in operational or salvage needs. Chile's Naval helicopters were also present and over flew the area several times throughout the last few days. It is unconfirmed whether anyone had actually watched the vessel "sink" or not. There remains a **slight possibility** that the vessel simply flipped over and is sitting subsurface upside down. The vessel could remain upside down for a significant period of time. Due to current and wind conditions in the area, the M/S *Explorer* could "drift" for sometime towards Elephant Island. G.A.P. is now seeking verification from various sources on whether or not anyone saw the vessel actually sink. In the meantime, all vessels sailing in this area should be aware of the potential navigational obstruction. If other vessels were in attendance, IAATO would like to extend its thanks for their assistance.

Possible Environmental Impacts

In terms of environmental implications, the vessel uses MGO (Marine Gas Oil) fuel, and as the incident occurred in open water with an estimated depth of 500m, it is expected that any fuel seepage will disperse promptly with no adverse effects on the environment. There is concern regarding lube oil, plastics and other pollutants. It was estimated that 190 cbm of MGO was in the fuel tanks at the time the incident occurred.

The request for IAATO vessels passing the area 62° 23' 32" S, 57° 16' 09" W to monitor, report and collect any marine debris, flotsam or pollution, and to monitor and report landing sites for any debris or indication of pollution has been circulated to all vessels and companies, and remains in place for the duration of the season.

Contact Information: G.A.P. Adventures: www.gapadventures.com (Toronto, Canada, Eastern Standard time).

Susan Hayes | Vice-President, Marketing
G.A.P. Adventures
Worldwide Small Group Adventures, Safaris & Expeditions
19 Charlotte Street, Toronto, ON, Canada M5V 2H5
416 263 4695 | 1 800 465 5600 | fax 416 260 1888
susanh@gap.ca

G.A.P. Adventures has been an IAATO Member since 2005. Their vessel the M/S *Explorer* has been offering tourist trips in Antarctica since 1970 under the management of several IAATO companies.

G.A.P. is permitted to travel to Antarctica by the Canadian Government/Environment Canada.

G.A.P. Adventures and M/S *Explorer* Statistics

Capacity: 108 passengers, 65 crew
Length: 72.8 meters
Width: 14.0 meters
Draft: 4.48
Gross Tons: 2398
Double Hull, Ice Class rating DNV Ice A

The vessel was certified to operate by numerous overarching international regulations, which include the ship's registry, Det Norske Veritas (DNV), ISM (International, Classification Society and Port State Inspections, etc.).

M/S *Explorer* received its full term (5 year) International Safety Management Certificate (ISM) from Classification Society, Lloyds Register, acting on behalf of the Flag State. In July 2007, the vessel underwent a scheduled dry dock which was completed in Las Palmas on October 21, 2007. All safety features were checked and any work found to be necessary was carried out under the supervision of Classification Society, DNV. This work included a "5 year test of lifeboats and lifeboat davits," including weight tests. A Passenger Ship Safety Certificate was then issued by DNV before leaving dry dock.

G.A.P. and its advisors are in touch with environmental experts at ITOPF (International Tankers Owners Pollution Federation) in order to develop an action plan to address potential pollution issues.

About IAATO

Contact Information: iaato@iaato.org, Denise Landau, Executive Director/IAATO.
+1 970 704 1047, +1970 704 9660 (Colorado, USA, Mountain Standard Time)

IAATO is a member organization founded in 1991 to advocate, promote and practice safe and environmentally responsible private sector travel to the Antarctic. IAATO currently has 99 members. IAATO Members work together to develop, adopt and implement operational standards that mitigate potential environmental impacts. Numerous guidelines have been adopted over the last 17 years that have proven to be successful methods for avoiding impacts. Those include but are not limited to: site specific guidelines, site selection criteria, passenger to staff ratios, limiting numbers of passengers ashore, boot washing guidelines and the prevention of the transmission of alien organisms, wilderness etiquette, garbage policy, ship scheduling and vessel communication procedures, emergency medical evacuation procedures, emergency contingency plans, reporting procedures, marine wildlife watching guidelines, station visitation policies and more.

In addition, IAATO Members agreed several years ago to have an emergency contingency plan to ensure safety of passengers and crew. These procedures were followed during this incident and contributed towards the success of the rescue.

This is the first incident of its kind with a specially designed tourist vessel in the last 50 years of Antarctic tourism. Very few incidents have occurred since IAATO began.

For Tourism Trends and Company Information see:

ATCM XXX IP121 Overview of Tourism <http://www.iaato.org/info.html>

Tourism Statistics: http://www.iaato.org/tourism_stats.html

IAATO is requesting its Member Vessels passing the area 62° 23' 32" S, 57°16' 09" W to monitor, report and collect any marine debris, flotsam or pollution. In addition, Member Vessels are requested to monitor and report throughout the whole 2007-08 season, landing sites with any debris or indication of pollution that may drift ashore.

Further, IAATO has sent out an IAATO wide alert (also to National Programs) advising of the potential of the ship being subsurface.

IAATO will continue to work closely with G.A.P. and all vessels to monitor the situation.

Reports sent to IAATO on November 24, 2007

- At (19.00 hrs UTC -3). IAATO vessel: M/V *Professor Molchanov*/Oceanwide Expeditions arrived at the site. They reported that the weather throughout the day included force 6-8 winds with periodic blowing snow and unexpected pack ice. There was an oil spill of approximately one square nm loosely estimated at position 62-24 S, 57-12 W. Photographs were taken. The Chilean Navy was also in the area patrolling by vessel and helicopter