



Agenda Item: ATCM 10
Presented by: Argentina,
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SAR Communication Exercise: Argentina - IAATO

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Information paper submitted by Argentina and IAATO

Summary

In August 2013, Argentina received an invitation from the "International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators" (IAATO) for a communications exercise between Ushuaia Maritime Search and Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC Ushuaia), a tour operator and vessels belonging to the Association sailing in Antarctica, which had voluntarily chosen to participate.

The proposal was accepted and IAATO suggested the involvement of Tour Operators Aurora Expeditions, with their vessel MV "POLAR PIONEER", and Oceanwide Expeditions, with their vessel MV "PLANCIUS", who together with the MRCC Ushuaia and the Argentine Navy vessel ARA "SUBOFICIAL CASTILLO" sailing in the Antarctic Peninsula, carried out this communications exercise.

Scenario

The MV "POLAR PIONEER", at position 62 ° 13.39 ' S, 59 ° 43.37 ' W, is adrift after having lost propulsion, probably because of fishing nets entangled in the propeller. The vessel produces electricity through its auxiliary generators producing sufficient power to maintain communications and basic services.

The Exercise

At 15:00hrs (UTC) on February 12, 2014, the MV "POLAR PIONEER" makes an emergency call to MRCC Ushuaia, reporting propulsion problems due to a possible obstruction in its propellers.

The MRCC Ushuaia classifies the request for assistance and requires information about the damage, the ship's position, nautical situation of the vessel, meteorological conditions in the area, state and number of people on board to make a detailed assessment to determine the nature and urgency of the situation

Unable to resolve the issue the MV "POLAR PIONEER" resolves evacuate passengers.

MRCC Ushuaia checks the tracking systems for vessels in its sector of responsibility and makes contact with the nearest vessel in the area of the incident, the MV "PLANCIUS", which is asked to quickly proceed to the position of the incident, designating it as On-Scene Commander (OSC). At the same time, MRCC sends a detailed report on the status of MV "POLAR PIONEER" to the MV "PLANCIUS".

MV "PLANCIUS" makes telephone contact with the MV "POLAR PIONEER" to coordinate the rendezvous, the timings and details regarding the transfer of passengers.

MRCC Ushuaia maintains regular contact with the stricken vessel and informs the ARA "SUBOFICIAL CASTILLO" of the situation, who begins the approach to the area where the MV "POLAR PIONEER" to provide support.

At 17:20hrs (UTC), the MV "PLANCIUS" arrives at the position of MV "POLAR PIONEER" and proceeds to transfer 64 passengers smoothly.

The MV "PLANCIUS" provides a situation report to MRCC Ushuaia and MV "POLAR PIONEER" declares the SAR Exercise concluded.

Conclusion

The SAR communications exercise met the objectives of establishing fast, secure and reliable communications in order to provide the required assistance, ensuring optimum coordination between the Owners, Tour Operators, their ships, the MRCC Ushuaia and SAR support units stationed in Antarctica.

IAATO through their representatives exercised their own protocols for crisis management, evacuation, broadcasting media and relatives of the passengers evacuated.

Such exercises allow participants to exchange experiences, acquire emergency training and draw conclusions that contribute to the effectiveness of the SAR system as a tool for the protection of human life at sea.