



# Bundesstelle für Seeunfalluntersuchung

## Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation

Federal Higher Authority subordinated to the Ministry of  
Transport and Digital Infrastructure

Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation, P.O. Box 30 12 20 • 20305 Hamburg

**Office building**  
Bernhard-Nocht-Str. 78  
20359 Hamburg  
Tel.: + 49 (0) 40 31 90 – 0  
Fax: + 49 (0) 40 31 90 – 83 40  
[posteingang-bsu@bsh.de](mailto:posteingang-bsu@bsh.de)  
[www.bsu-bund.de](http://www.bsu-bund.de)

**Your reference**  
Your message from

**My reference**  
(please state on reply)  
402/15

**+ 49 (0) 40 31 90 – 8321**

**Date**

**E-Mail: [posteingang-bsu@bsh.de](mailto:posteingang-bsu@bsh.de) 26 April 2017**

### Press Release 11/17

The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) hereby gives notice that the Investigation Report about the investigation into the fatal accident onboard the chartered sailing yacht DESDEMONA which occurred on 21 September 2015, was published on 26. April 2017. This report – as well as all previous reports – is available on the website <http://www.bsu-bund.de> and can be downloaded.

Short version:

### Very serious marine casualty – Fatal accident on board the sailing yacht DESDEMONA

On 21 September 2015, a fatal accident occurred onboard the German sailing yacht DESDEMONA in the area of the port approach Rostock-Warnemünde. A crewmember suddenly fell into the water, probably due to a swell-induced strong movement of the yacht. Although the remaining crewmembers immediately initiated search measures they

did not manage to take the co-sailor back on board. Similar to the remaining crew members, he was not wearing a life jacket. The casualty lost his consciousness shortly after having fallen into the water and drowned in the Baltic Sea. Search measures carried out by the Waterways Police, the Federal Police, the fire department and the sea

rescue service were unsuccessful. On 1 October 2015, the corpse of the sailor was discovered only a few miles from the scene of the accident and recovered. The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) started the investigation after receipt of the accident notification.

The BSU published its investigation report which includes two safety recommendations addressed to the

Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure on 26 April 2017.

This report – as well as all previous reports – is available on the website <http://www.bsu-bund.de> and can be downloaded.

Long version:

### **Very serious marine casualty – Fatal accident on board the sailing yacht DESDEMONA**

An accident with subsequent loss of life occurred on the German-flagged sailing yacht DESDEMONA while en route from Gedser to Rostock-Warnemünde on 21 September 2015. The DESDEMONA is a charter yacht and her port of registry is Lübeck. The four-person crew had chartered the yacht for the period 19–25 September 2015 for a sailing trip on the Baltic Sea. On the day of the accident, the DESDEMONA sailed out of the Danish port of Gedser at about 1000 under engine power and then proceeded toward Rostock under sail in wind forces of 4–5 Bft. She passed the Rostock approach shortly before 1300 and then continued close to the green buoy line of the Warnemünde navigational channel outside the fairway. A decision was made on board to strike the sails while in harbour mode and sail into Warnemünde under engine power.

At about 1330, a crew member who wanted to assist with taking in the sails suddenly fell overboard between fairway buoys 9 and 11. In all likelihood, the fall was due to a violent movement of the yacht caused by a swell. Despite the rescue effort immediately initiated by the other three crew members, it was not possible to haul the casualty back on board. Similar to the remaining crew members, the casualty was neither wearing a lifejacket nor was he secured by a line. The casualty lost consciousness shortly after falling into the water and drowned in the Baltic Sea. The emergency services were alerted at about 1345. They arrived at the scene only a few minutes later but were unable to find the sailor.

On 1 October 2015, the body of the sailor was found drifting lifeless in the Baltic Sea some four nautical miles north-east of the scene of the accident by an operational vessel of the German Navy and recovered by the crew of the summoned WSP boat WARNOW.

Within the framework of the analysis of the accident, the BSU dealt extensively with the regulations for the equipment and carriage requirements of lifejackets applying to German pleasure craft. Insofar, it was noted that a carriage requirement for lifejackets does only exist for certain charter yachts. However, there is neither a legal requirement to wear lifejackets with respect to charter yachts and pleasure yachts only used privately.

From the perspective of the BSU, with the exception of sound education and continuous training, there is little scope for reducing the intrinsic characteristic of humans to start to panic in an emotional state of emergency. This generally applicable finding is true of the pleasure craft sector, in particular. Precisely here it is regularly the case that participants of this hobby do not feel as if they are confronted, on a daily basis, with specific risk situations. Unlike professional emergency services (e.g. maritime, fire, mountain rescue), the operators of pleasure craft are, by the very nature of things, not trained specifically in responding properly to a distress situation almost instinctively, even if they have enjoyed good training and carried out their hobby for years. It is in the nature of things that pleasure craft sailors are not specifically trained to respond with a knee-jerk reaction in case of a distress.

Accordingly, the issue of carrying sufficient (in terms of quantity and quality) life-saving appliances is all the more relevant in the pleasure craft sector, in particular. Inextricably linked with the above is the need to ensure that corresponding items of equipment are actually made use of.

For safety reasons, a carriage requirement with respect to lifejackets as well as mandatory use of lifejackets should be introduced for all pleasure craft sailing on the Navigable Maritime Waterways and in German territorial waters irrespective of their size and legal categorization. The investigation report includes two safety recommendations addressed to the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure aimed at examining the legal options for extending the legal requirement to carry lifejackets to all seagoing pleasure craft, i.e. regardless of classification as a charter boat.

Volker Schellhammer  
Director of the BSU