

23 Rescued From Boat Sinking Within Former Bombing Range Area

Posted At : June 5, 2016 7:02 PM | Posted By : Admin

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Dorchester County, Maryland A boat carrying 23 people including 14 students sank after hitting an underwater obstacle off of Bloodsworth Island, a former bombing range / target area in the Chesapeake Bay. The boat was in about 10 feet of water just west of the island when the accident occurred. The boat captain issued a distress signal over the radio as passengers, including the fourth grade students, put on their life jackets and the clung to sides of the boat.

A local waterman, Jeremy Shockley, hearing the distress call on the radio rushed to the scene and picked up the stranded passengers and brought them to shore in Wingate, on the eastern shore of Maryland. When Maryland Natural Resource Police and the Coast Guard responded and few minutes later, they helped coordinate emergency service personnel responding from the land.

Although no detonations occurred during the sinking, authorities all realize that the situation could have been much worse had the fourth graders and/or the other passengers encountered UXO during the ordeal. Bloodsworth Island is reportedly littered with UXO from its use supporting military training from 1942 through 1996 including the dropping of live ordnance.

The students were on a trip sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay foundation when the accident occurred. Apparently, the obstacle that sunk the boat was an old tank hulk (most likely an old bombing target) that was just below the water surface. The area is marked off limits on nautical charts due to obstacles. The accident is under investigation.