

under the bridges. Later, when the tide changed, these teams needed repositioning. The river police, with their experience, were able to identify the most likely sites and times that survivors and bodies would be recovered, but night conditions rendered visibility difficult. After the initial rescue activity, there was a prolonged period of searching followed by the slow recovery of the dead trapped within the hull.

This incident, tragic as it was, seems small when compared with similar incidents in the past. In the 19th century, a similar incident left 600 dead and also will be described. "The man who fails to learn from the mistakes of history is doomed to repeat them."

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The "M/S Maxim Gorkij" Accident

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On 19 June 1989, at 22.28 UTC, the "M/S Maxim Gorkij" hit an iceberg at the position of 77.37-N 004.10-E, 145.5 nm west of Spitsbergen. The ship was seriously damaged and there was an imminent risk that the ship would sink. There were 953 persons on board, mainly German pensioners. There was fog in the area, the wind was blowing at 22 knots, and the temperature was +1.3°C.

A major rescue operation was initiated, headed by the Norwegian RCC in Bodo. Five Norwegian rescue helicopters and one Norwegian coast guard vessel participated in the operation. The "M/S Maxim Gorkij" stayed afloat, and there were no major problems during the rescue operation. Nevertheless, the operation was a great challenge to the rescue forces, especially at the damage area. The accident also threw light on an ever more pressing problem: how to attend to the safety of tourists travelling in remote areas with extreme weather conditions?

As of today, there are no rescue or medical services that can handle such large accidents in remote areas within acceptable time limits. The existing medical resources are not sufficient to deal with the number of serious casualties in connection with such accidents.

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The "Scandinavian Star" Fire Disaster— What Could have Saved the Passengers?

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The "Scandinavian Star" caught fire on the Skagerak in April 1990, killing 158 people. Only 30 people had minor injuries and 324 were saved. Of the 158 persons that died, 100 died from inhalation of cyanide and carbon monoxide in the smoke; 52 also were burned; and six possibly were killed directly by the fire. All the dead were trapped inside the ship. Only early evacuation of the passengers from the smoke and fire could have saved them.

Conclusion: Sending medical teams to a burning ship should not have priority.