GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

Tel: (284)468-2730
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Call for Greater Navigational Awareness to Reduce Vessel-Groundings in Virgin Islands Waters

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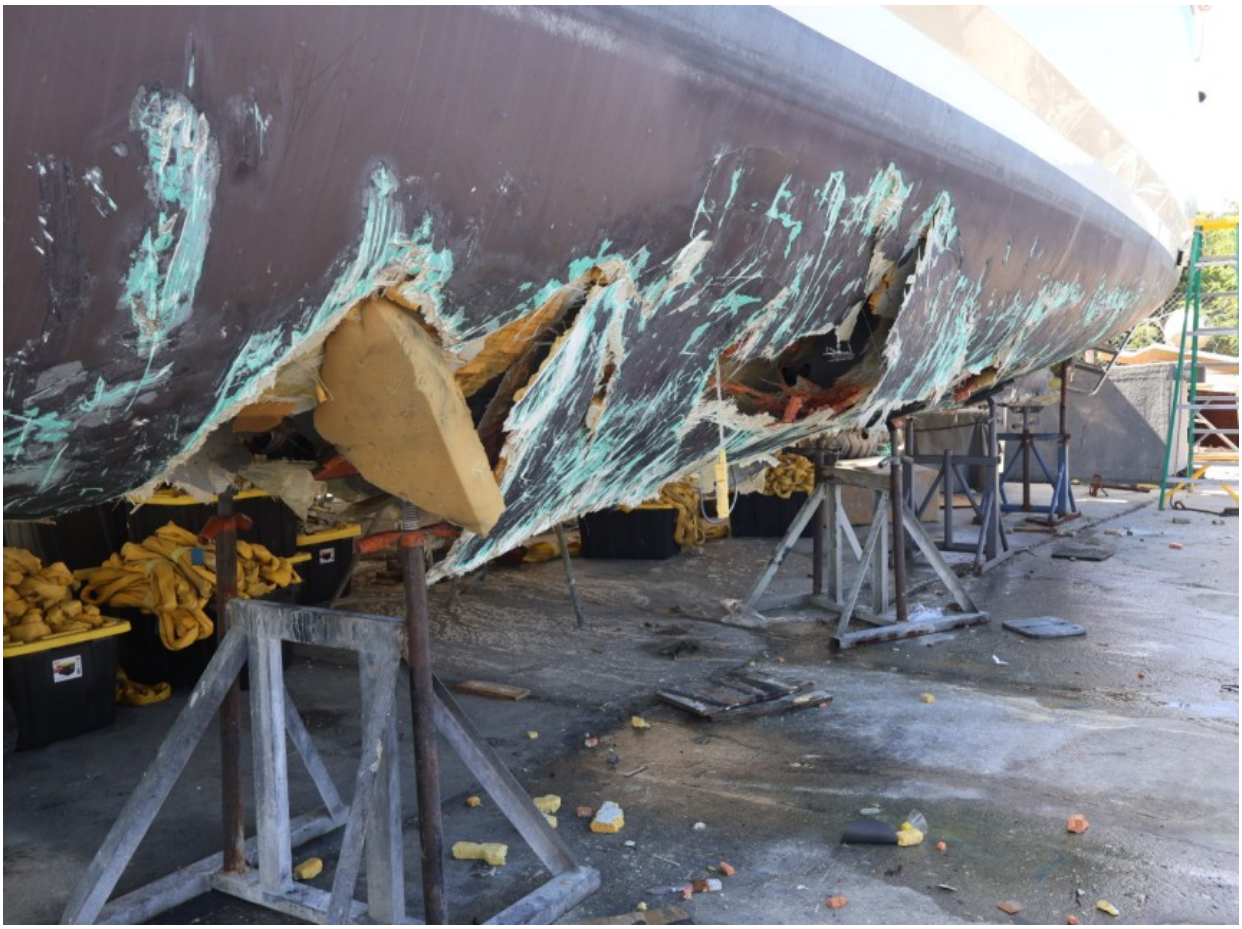

In recent weeks, the Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA) has recorded a significant number of vessel-grounding incidents, and the Chief Marine Accident Investigator in the Premier's Office, Mr. Jerome Padmore, is calling on all vessel owners and operators to heighten their vigilance while sailing in Virgin Islands waters.

The MSIRA has recorded a total of 10 vessel groundings from February to December this year, with four of those incidents occurring between October and December alone.

"This is a significant number and it is concerning, especially given that the marine tourism season is just beginning. In fact, it highlights the urgent need to reinforce strict situational and navigational awareness when operating in local waters," Mr. Padmore stated. "Each incident occurred under different circumstances, primarily involving bareboat charter catamarans, but despite that, all these groundings share a common theme: diminished attention to the navigational environment, inadequate passage planning, and an over-reliance on electronic charts and systems."

He explained that groundings are incidents that are often preventable, primarily arising from human error rather than mechanical failures or unexpected dangers. He further pointed out that common causes include lapses in concentration, misinterpretation of navigational tools, incorrect assessments of shallow areas, and excessive reliance on electronic navigation systems.

"In regions like the Virgin Islands, operators must remain vigilant due to the complex geography, which includes numerous islands, cays, reefs, shoals, and submerged rock formations," the Chief Marine Accident Investigator noted. "These elements can vary with changes in tides and weather conditions, making attention to detail essential for safe navigation."

According to Mr. Padmore, groundings pose serious environmental risks, damaging coral reefs, seagrass beds, and marine habitats. He said even a single incident can result in years of ecosystem harm and costly restoration; therefore, preventing these incidents must be a shared priority among operators and charter companies.

The Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA) urges all vessel operators, whether charter crews, private owners, commercial operators, or bareboat charters, to reaffirm their commitment to safe navigation. This commitment includes reviewing the operators' criteria for bareboat charters, proper briefing, reviewing the Cruising Guide of the Virgin Islands and local charts before departure, following designated channels, continuously monitoring water depth, paying attention to navigational buoys, and reporting any navigational issues.

All operators, charter companies, and marine industry professionals are reminded that they are legally obligated to report all marine accidents, including groundings. These accidents and incidents must be reported to the Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA) within 24 hours, as required by the Virgin Islands Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation and Reporting) Regulations 2020.

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About:

The Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA) operates under the Premier’s Office and is the official body responsible for the independent investigation of marine accidents and incidents within the territorial waters of The Virgin Islands. Guided by the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations, 2020 and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Casualty Investigation Code, MSIRA's primary objective is to enhance maritime safety through fact-based investigations, the identification of safety issues, and the issuance of recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. MSIRA investigations do not seek to apportion blame or establish liability.

For Additional Information Contact:

Angela U Burns
Information Officer II

Premier's Office
Government of The Virgin Islands
Tel: +1 284 468 9445
Email: aburns@gov.vg
Website: https://gov.vg/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/BVIGovernment/

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