Report on the Deaths of Four U.S. Citizen Tourists in Three Incidents

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Summary

Four U.S. citizens died in three separate incidents on tour expeditions authorized by the United States, the Netherlands, and Norway during the 2022-2023 season. Relevant agencies in those governments are investigating the incidents. Other interested parties, such as Portugal and Argentina, are closely monitoring the incidents and investigations. The governments act under domestic authority for all investigative activity. The governments may bring recommendations to the ATCM if they identify reasonable actions to increase tourism safety.

Brief Summary of the Preliminary Reports from the Incidents

On November 15, two deaths occurred when the inflatable boat flipped in the shallow waters at 61°11.010’ S, 055°03.299’ W near Elephant Island. The inflatable boat was operated from the *World Explorer* by an experienced guide of Quark Expeditions and the general weather conditions were sunny and calm. Passengers were wearing cold-weather clothing but not clothing appropriate for immersion in cold water.

The United States gave notice according to the Treaty Article VII (5) through the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES) for Quark’s operations and Portugal is the country of registry for the *World Explorer*. Its maximum passenger capacity is 172 and maximum crew capacity is 135. The *World Explorer* was commissioned in 2019.

On November 29, one death occurred when a rogue wave struck the *Viking Polaris* operated by Viking Cruises at 56°31.229’ S, 066°08.2’ W as it crossed the Drake Passage outside of the Antarctic Treaty area. The wave broke seven windows causing major damage to some of the passenger cabins on the lower level.

Norway gave notice according to the Treaty Article VII (5) through the EIES for *Viking Polaris’s* operations and is the country of registry for the *Viking Polaris*. Its maximum passenger capacity is 378 and maximum crew capacity is 256. The *Viking Polaris* was commissioned in 2022; the incident occurred on its fourth commercial voyage while the ship was sailing toward Ushuaia, Argentina.

On December 2, one death occurred after severe weather struck the *M/V Plancius* operated by Oceanwide Expeditions. The tourist hit his head on December 1 when the vessel was in stormy weather at 55°32.09’ S, 036°46.75’ W between South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula outside of the Antarctic Treaty area and died the next day. The vessel was too far from emergency medical support for evacuation once ship staff learned of the severity of the passenger’s injury.

The Netherlands gave notice according to the Treaty Article VII (5) through the EIES for Oceanwide’s operations and the Netherlands is its country of registry for the *M/V Plancius*. Its maximum passenger capacity is 108 and maximum crew capacity is 40. The *M/V Plancius*, formerly known as the *HNLMS Tydeman*, was commissioned in 1976.

***Next Steps***

The countries will continue to rely on their domestic legal authorities and follow their domestic procedures on the investigations and anticipate sharing the final results with the ATCM.

For the United States, the U.S. Coast Guard is investigating the November 15 and November 29 incidents, supported by the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board. The U.S. Coast Guard is investigating the December 1 incident. They have briefed the U.S. Department of State, Environmental Protection Agency, and National Science Foundation on the ongoing investigations. The U.S. Department of State has updated its Travel Advisory for travel to the Antarctic Region (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/antarctica-travel-advisory.html>) to further emphasize marine risks and limited emergency services available in the region.

For Norway, the Norwegian Safety Investigation Authority has launched a safety investigation into the November 29 incident. The incident occurred outside the Antarctic Treaty Area, so the Norwegian Polar Institute, which is the National Competent Authority for the Environmental Protocol to the Treaty, is not involved in this investigation. However, the Norwegian Polar Institute does follow up on potential concerns regarding safety in Antarctica.

For the Netherlands, Rijkswaterstaat, which is the National Competent Authority of the Netherlands, will discuss the circumstances regarding the December 2 incident with Oceanwide. They will discuss the safety instructions and whether there is a need to pay more specific attention to these safety instructions in the licensing process.