

Marine casualty



Risk assessment*: The likelihood of a marine casualty in Estonian waters with a high number of casualties or significant environmental damage is low. Compared to the previous assessment, the risk likelihood has been raised from unlikely to low.

**In 2025, the risk of marine casualty was not assessed, but the threat of a large-scale maritime rescue event and a large-scale marine pollution were assessed separately*

Marine casualties are usually caused by **human error**. In recent years, the number of vessels in distress has been on an upward trend, but this is mainly due to the increase in the number of recreational craft. In 2023, there were fifteen officially recorded incidents (10) or casualties (5) in Estonian waters and a total of 29 cases were recorded. The most notable of these were the unsafe approach of two vessels, R/L Elina and R/L Baltic Queen; the listing of R/L Amalie, which required the evacuation of passengers, and the collision of R/L Regula with a quay.

CAUSES AND THREATS

- ✓ Nearly 90% of marine casualties are caused **by human error**: navigation error, miscalculation, sudden manoeuvres, inadequate or incorrect assessment of hazards, inattention or distraction, misunderstandings, etc.
- ✓ **Technological causes**: failure of machinery, systems, or equipment, hull damage.
- ✓ **Adverse weather conditions**.

FACTORS INCREASING THE RISK

- ✓ **dense and intersecting** vessel traffic and **increasing traffic of recreational craft**.
- ✓ **growth in liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments**.
- ✓ **expansion of offshore wind farm areas**.

- ✓ **trends in maritime technology**, including the use of novel, untested ship control and navigation tools in narrow and congested lanes.
- ✓ **activities of the Russian Federation.**
- ✓ **undetected movements of vessels** (AIS transmitter deactivation, GPS manipulation, etc.).
- ✓ Bunkering in more economically viable but more exposed areas, as well as fuel leaking from wrecks that have sunk decades ago (it is estimated that there are 57 environmentally hazardous wrecks in Estonian waters) **increase the risk of pollution.**

WORST-CASE SCENARIO

A collision between a passenger ship and an oil tanker in the Estonian rescue area.

CODE OF CONDUCT

If you are involved in an accident or see an accident with casualties, please report it immediately to the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC Tallinn) of the Police and Border Guard Board by calling 619 1224 or 112. As calmly as possible, say what has happened, what you see, where the accident happened, and answer all the questions asked by the rescue officer. As a passenger on a ship:

- ✓ check the locations of the assembly points and lifesaving equipment at the start of the trip.
- ✓ in case of an emergency, follow the instructions of the staff and authorities.
- ✓ go to the nearest assembly point when instructed to do so.
- ✓ take only essential items with you:
 - documents and phone.
 - the everyday medicines you use.
 - wear warm clothes.
- ✓ Stay on board as long as possible, avoid getting into the water.

Stay calm and follow the instructions of the authorities and the emergency services.

Expand all

[Read more](#)

[Statistics on marine casualties opens in a new tab](#), Estonian Transport Administration

[Annual Overview of Marine Casualties opens in a new tab](#), Europe Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA).

Reviews of the **[Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission opens in a new tab](#)** (HELCOM)

[Website of the ferry M/S Estonia opens in a new tab](#), Safety Investigation Bureau

Last updated on 20.11.2025