

NEWS

Whale slams into boat, killing tourist

By Associated Press

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A boat which collided with a whale near the beach resort of Cabo San Lucas. Photo: AP

CABO SAN LUCAS, Mexico — A 35-year-old Canadian woman died and two other tourists suffered “considerable” injuries when a surfacing whale crashed into the side of their boat, Mexican authorities said Thursday.

The Attorney General’s Office for Environmental Protection said the boat was carrying nine tourists on a snorkel tour and was near shore when the collision occurred Wednesday.

Photos showed the open boat, about 25 feet long with twin outboard motors, apparently undamaged after the collision.

In a statement to prosecutors, the company that operated the boat, Cabo Adventures, said it was returning from its excursion when the whale suddenly appeared. It said the captain tried to turn, but the whale struck the vessel. Contacted by telephone, a company employee said the firm had no further comment.

The Baja California Sur state prosecutor’s office said the collision near the beach resort of Cabo San Lucas tossed the victim, who died into the water.

A crew member and a passenger lifted her back onto the vessel and Mexican navy personnel moved her to shore. She was taken to a clinic, where she was pronounced dead.

Prosecutor’s spokesman Sergio Villarreal said the woman died from head trauma. He said it was the first death in this type of accident he knew of.

The woman’s hometown was not released. John Babcock, a spokesman for Canada’s Foreign Affairs Department, said that “to protect the private and personal information of the individual concerned, further details on this case cannot be released.”

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VIDEO





A tourist receives first aid aboard the boat that collided with a whale in Cabo San Lucas. Photo: AP

While it did not say excessive speed played a role in the accident, the port captain's office for Cabo San Lucas issued a circular Thursday saying it had ordered its employees to ensure boats respect the 4-knot speed limit in San Lucas bay.

The office said that due to the presence of whales, it was advising vessels to operate with greater caution. The office also announced a temporary, 15-knot speed limit on boats in open water outside the bay, which it said will last as long as the whales are in the area.

The local representative of the attorney general for environmental protection, Jesus Tesemi Avendano, said the boat was not in a protected whale reserve area and it had not been on a whale-watching tour. He said the large number of whales sighted in Baja California Sur this year "may have played a role" in the collision.

While officials identified the animal as a gray whale, Jorge Urban, a professor of biology at the Baja California State University who specializes in whales, said it was almost certainly a humpback whale.

Urban said such accidents are not common. "This is the first time in 30 years of studying whales that I have heard about an accident like this ... in which passengers are pitched into the sea, and one dies," he said.

Whales surface to breathe, often unexpectedly. Collisions between whales and boats are not unknown in Mexico, where whales come to breed in coastal lagoons in winter. In January 2014, a boat and a humpback whale collided off the coast of Baja California, injuring a US tourist and three other people on board.

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