Lethal Propeller

Working hard even in Summer, when others are on vacation, and putting off holidays until Winter, when most people are back at work: a common necessity for those who manage activities in close contact with the public. Also for Angelo* travelling off-season has become an established habit, shared with his partner Paola*.

They both love the sea and scuba diving: what better destination, then, than an exotic resort to take a break from the cold Winter? Breathtaking atolls, dream ocean floors and even an advanced diving course: the ingredients for an unforgettable holiday are all there.

The couple leaves for the Indian Ocean at the end of January for a two-week stay, but their plans are not intended to be realized.
It's the last day of January, a little past 3.00 p.m. After a pre-dive briefing, the two get on the dhoni that carries them on the dive site, not far from the main boat anchor point. On board there are also other fans of the "big blue", scuba divers and snorkelers, eager to dive in.
A few seconds to go, and the life of Angelo will be broken by the propeller blades of the same dhoni who led him to destination.

The testimony of Riccardo, who acts as a guide to the couple, makes us relive in detail the dramatic event:

The first group, consisting of a guide and three divers, dives into the water from the exit point near the bow of the diving dhoni, and immediately after it's our turn: we dive into the water from the same exit point.
A strong wind is blowing, but as the dive site is inside the atoll, there are no currents or waves. I clearly remember that, at the time of the dive and descent, the dhoni's engine is not shifted into gear.
After the exchange of the OK signals on the surface, I communicate verbally the beginning of the descent and make the signal for descent. On our way down, we are all close to each other. I notice that Angelo is going down slowly, so I use the shaker (editor's note: acoustic signaling device), shaking it repeatedly in order to get his attention and advice him to descend more quickly, since the hull of the dhoni is getting closer to him (the draft of the dhoni is approximately 1,5 mt).
Meanwhile I keep my visual control on the divers, continuing to signal to Angelo to go down; in order to help him, I start swimming towards him. In that moment I hear the sound of the engine of the dhoni, shifted into gear. The man goes up suddenly – perhaps because he's swimming upwards, or inhaling deeply – and ends in contact with the propeller, which is located at about 1 mt from the surface.
Panicking, his dive buddy and life partner removes the regulator from her mouth and inflates her BCD, starting a fast ascent. I stay with her, standing very close to her until we reach the surface, trying to slow her rate of ascent (I later found that my computer had recorded a rapid ascent). Everything happens in a few moments.
Once on the surface, I cry havoc; the group of snorkelers and their guide begin to seek Angelo, while I stay close to Paola, who's obviously extremely agitated, trying to calm her down as much as possible.
It takes them a few seconds to find him. From the boat, they tell me that his body had floated to the surface and had been hoisted on board. I fasten Paola to a line, which has been thrown by the dhoni, telling her to hold on to it and instructing a crew member to keep an eye on her.
The wind is blowing and the dhoni is drifting: swimming with difficulty, I reach the ladder. Once out of the water, I rush aft, where Angelo is lying. I check his breathing and heartbeat, but don't register any sign of life.
I start with chest compressions, and am immediately replaced by the captain of the boat who continues

with compressions, while I devote myself to the insufflation and control of bleeding.
We continue the resuscitation and tamponing for about 30-40 minutes, until our arrival to the island where the nearest hospital is.

Unfortunately, the rescuers' efforts are vain: the man is declared dead from head trauma. Meanwhile, the local police confiscates the victim's dive gear (jacket, regulator, computer): one of the two valves of the cylinder is split, while his BCD and the whip of the air source are sliced. The process to allow for the repatriation of the body is started, and an investigation into the incident is opened.
Fatality or human error? Whatever the cause, to prevent death from staining the water of the oceans and seas again there's only one way: prevention.

Read the DAN press release on propeller accidents
Get involved in our prevention campaign