

Sub makes rapid ascent in Indian Ocean; crew safe

March 19 2019, by Jerry Harmer And David Keyton



Submersible pilots from the UK-led Nekton Mission converse after one of their craft was forced to conduct an emergency ascent from 250 meters beneath the surface of the Indian ocean off the Seychelles, Tuesday March 19, 2019. A British scientist and her American pilot were inside the submersible when it filled with smoke. Both are now safe onboard the mother ship where an electrical fire aboard the sub is being investigated as the possible cause. (AP Photo/David Keyton)

Technicians investigating the cause of a subsea emergency in which a British scientist and her American pilot made a rapid ascent from 250 meters (820 feet) beneath the Indian Ocean on Tuesday now think it's

unlikely it was caused by an electrical fire, though they are yet to come to a conclusion.

The pair with the British-led Nekton Mission investigating climate change off the Seychelles initiated the emergency procedure after an acrid smell of smoke seeped into the cockpit of their submersible. Neither was injured in the incident.

Nekton Mission director Oliver Steeds said he hoped it would be back in the water on Wednesday, adding that emergency procedures had worked well.

The sub was off Aldabra Island when pilot Robert Carmichael smelled smoke and immediately began to ascend. He told The Associated Press he quickly fitted breathing masks to his passenger, Molly Rivers, and himself. He began an emergency rise to the surface as the oxygen indicator fell to zero, though he added it might have been due to an instrument malfunction.

"It's the greatest fear: fire inside the cockpit. Your greatest fear. Where are you going to go?" Carmichael said.

A member of the sub's support team said it took 23 minutes to reach the surface.

The vessel was one of two involved in Sky TV's "Deep Ocean Live" program, part of a two-year campaign by the British broadcaster to focus attention on the state of the world's oceans.



A submersible after British scientist and her American pilot had to make an emergency ascent from 250 meters beneath the surface of the Indian ocean off the Seychelles after smoke filled their two-person submersible, Tuesday March 19, 2019. The pair, from the UK-led Nekton Mission investigating climate change in the region, are both safe onboard the mother ship where an electrical fire aboard the sub is being investigated as the possible cause. (AP Photo/David Keyton)

The Nekton Mission is documenting changes taking place beneath the Indian Ocean that could affect billions of people in the surrounding region over the coming decades.

The mission has been dogged with bad luck since it left Victoria, the Seychelles capital, at the beginning of March. Poor weather forced a change in route, an underwater drone was temporarily stranded on the seabed and other key equipment has malfunctioned.

The Associated Press is the only news agency working with British scientists from the research team. Sky News is the mission's

programming partner. AP video coverage will include exploring the depths of up to 300 meters (985 feet) off the coast of the Seychelles, the search for submerged mountain ranges and previously undiscovered marine life, a behind-the-scenes look at life on board, interviews with researchers and aerial footage of the mission.

The seven-week expedition is expected to run until April 19.

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