

## Tinted Sunglasses

Are three men dead because ferry lookout wore tinted glasses?  
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The deaths of three City workers in the Channel could have been averted if a lookout on a P&O ferry had been wearing a different type of glasses. The men died when their yacht was either hit or swamped by the Pride Of Bilbao in August last year, according to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch.

The team investigating the accident off the Isle of Wight found the ferry's 60-year-old lookout was wearing photochromic lenses. These automatically lighten or darken depending on the conditions. However, these lenses 'effectively reduced his ability to see small lights by at least 20 per cent,' according to the team's report.

His eyes would have had trouble adapting to the dark because of light pollution. This could have meant he failed to spot the boat - and James Meaby, 36, Jason Downer, 35, and Rupert Saunders, 36 - in time.

The investigation found the lookout had first seen the lights on the yacht, called Ouzo, when it was only 300 metres ahead of the ferry at around 1am. The ferry's second officer altered its course, believing that the vessel was in danger of striking the yacht.

The 37,500-ton ferry, which had been travelling at a speed of 19 knots, then continued to Bilbao in Spain without taking further action.

After the yacht capsized, it is thought Mr Meaby had survived in the water for at least 12 hours and the other two for at least three hours.

A massive search and rescue operation was launched involving two Royal Navy warshipsan RAF Nimrod, coastguard helicopters and lifeboats.

The body of Mr Meaby, who worked for a paper company, was discovered floating ten miles south of the Isle of Wight. The bodies of Mr Saunders and Mr Downer were found the following night. The report found that had the ship's crew raised the alarm, even some hours after the event, it is extremely likely that at least one of the yachtsmen would have been saved.

Investigators called for lookouts on ferries to be banned from wearing glasses with photochromic lenses in future. The lenses are specially designed to darken immediately on exposure to sunlight. In the absence of UV rays, for example at night, the glasses return to their clear state.

In the wake of the report, the Department for Transport is reviewing their safety in certain situations. A study carried out by the Institute of Ophthalmology at University College London revealed that in some cases, a fifth of light was blocked out by the lenses.

The report concluded: "We would have reservations regarding the use of photochromic glasses in dark environments where significant and rapid changes in illumination were taking place and where the wearer was required to make critical decisions based on visual information."

Michael Hubble, who was second mate on the ferry that night, has been charged with three counts of manslaughter due to negligence. He denies the charges.

