

M-384A



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: June 25, 1993

In Reply Refer To: M-93-27

Honorable Federico Peña
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20590

On August 7, 1992, the United Kingdom passenger vessel RMS (Royal Mail Ship) QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 (QE2) was outbound in Vineyard Sound, Massachusetts, when the vessel grounded about 2 1/2 miles south of Cuttyhunk Island. No injuries or deaths resulted from this accident. However, damage was significant; temporary and permanent repairs cost about \$13.2 million. In addition, the total revenue lost for the period before the vessel returned to service on October 2, 1992, was estimated at \$50 million.¹

One of the safety issues explored by the Safety Board during its investigation of this accident was the adequacy of shipboard evacuation procedures for disabled passengers. The Safety Board found that although the difficulties experienced by disabled passengers did not cause major problems, they did illustrate the need for additional precautions to prepare disabled passengers for emergencies. For instance, one hearing-impaired passenger responding to the Safety Board's survey complained that she could not hear the public address system. When she attempted to gain information from the television in her room, she found that it was not equipped with closed caption. However, according to Cunard, the QE2 could have provided closed-caption programming through the ship's television system.

¹For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--*Grounding of the United Kingdom Passenger Vessel RMS QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 Near Cuttyhunk Island, Vineyard Sound, Massachusetts, August 7, 1992* (NTSB/MAR-93/01).

Hearing-impaired passengers should not be excluded from obtaining vital safety or emergency information. More than 28 million Americans have a hearing loss and 80 percent of those affected have permanent, irreversible hearing damage. In addition, more than one-third of the U.S. population has a significant hearing impairment by age 65, according to statistics compiled by the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. The population of older, potentially hearing-impaired passengers could be sizable. A statistician from the Cruise Line International Association stated that over a 5-year period, on average, 36 percent of the passengers traveling on cruise vessels were at least 60 years old.

The Safety Board believes that hearing-impaired and other disabled passengers should have a means of obtaining emergency information to prevent the possibility of not being notified of a vessel emergency such as fire, sinking, or evacuation. In light of the potential problems revealed by this investigation, the Safety Board concludes that disabled passengers who travel by ship require additional safety precautions to advise and prepare them to act in an emergency.

On September 6, 1991, the Department of Transportation (DOT) published final rules implementing the transportation provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (the Act). The Act requires accessibility to transportation facilities and makes it unlawful to discriminate against individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. The regulations did not contain any rules for vessels but reserved 49 CFR 37.109, "Ferries and Other Passenger Vessels," for future rulemaking. At this time, the DOT has indicated that it does not have sufficient information to develop accessibility regulations for disabled passengers and has contracted with a consultant to study the implementation of the Act as it pertains to passenger vessels.


The Safety Board believes that in addition to evaluating accessibility requirements, the DOT and the International Maritime Organization should study safety issues involving the disabled aboard passenger vessels.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Department of Transportation:

When implementing the accessibility requirements for ferries and other vessels in the Americans with Disabilities Act (49 CFR 37.109), include requirements to advise and evacuate disabled passengers in an emergency. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-93-27)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations M-93-17 through -26 to the U.S. Coast Guard, M-93-28 and -29 to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, M-93-30 through -33 to Cunard Lines, Ltd., and M-93-34 to State pilot commissions. The Safety Board is also reiterating Safety Recommendations M-91-6 and -28 to the U.S. Coast Guard. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 382-6850.

Chairman VOGT, Vice Chairman COUGHLIN, and Members LAUBER, HART, and HAMMERSCHMIDT concurred in this recommendation.


By: Carl W. Vogt
Chairman