

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 22, 1978

 Forwarded to:
 Honorable Robert J. Blackwell
 Assistant Secretary for Maritime Affairs
 Department of Commerce
 Washington, D.C. 20230

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-78-69

On January 10, 1977, the coastal tankship M/V CHESTER A. POLING broke in two about 6 nmi ESE of Cape Ann, Massachusetts. The POLING was en route from Everett, Massachusetts to Newington, New Hampshire, during a severe winter storm in a partially ballasted condition. The Coast Guard responded promptly to the POLING's distress message, and six of the seven persons aboard were rescued. One person, who fell into the ocean while attempting to enter the Coast Guard helicopter's rescue basket, is missing and presumed dead. 1/

When the POLING broke in two, the master and seaman in the wheelhouse on the forward part of the vessel were isolated from the primary lifesaving equipment which was stowed near the vessel's stern. When the bow began to sink, these men were forced to enter the 30° F ocean water with only personal flotation devices to sustain them. Fortunately, they were rescued within 20 minutes by the Coast Guard cutter CAPE GEORGE.

A Coast Guard helicopter made several attempts to rescue the crewmembers on the POLING's stern with a rescue basket. The first time the basket was lowered, it landed on some empty oil drums. The cook entered the basket and was successfully hoisted to the helicopter. However, on the next attempt the basket was held outboard at the ship's rail by one crewmember. As a seaman leaned outside the rail to grab the basket, he fell into the ocean and was lost. A guide line had been properly attached to the basket by the helicopter's crew, but the POLING's crew did not use it effectively to guide the basket to a safe location on the POLING's deck.

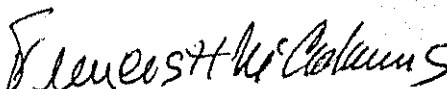
1/ For more detailed information read "Marine Accident Report--M/V CHESTER A. POLING Sinking near Cape Ann, Massachusetts, January 10, 1977," (NTSB-MAR-78-7).

Even though the Coast Guard responded promptly, five of the six persons rescued were forced to enter the cold ocean water. Although they were in the water only a short time, each person suffered from hypothermia. If the Coast Guard had not been able to respond as quickly as it did, more persons would have died.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Maritime Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce:

With assistance from the U.S. Coast Guard and maritime industry management and labor, develop a survival and rescue training course to provide instruction in Coast Guard sea rescue methods and in the proper actions merchant seamen should take to aid in their rescue. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-78-69)

KING, Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and DRIVER, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.


By: James B. King
Chairman
