

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: October 4, 1979

Forwarded to:

Director, Dr. William H. Menard
Geological Survey
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Center, 12201 Sunrise Valley Drive
Reston, Virginia 22092

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-79-100 and 101

On October 25, 1978, the U.S. Geological Survey research vessel (R/V) DON J. MILLER II, inbound to Seattle, Washington, was overtaking the fishing vessel (F/V) WELCOME, in Admiralty Inlet. The MILLER's master slowed his vessel to allow the WELCOME to clear ahead after which he increased the MILLER's speed. The MILLER's master then left the pilothouse, leaving the vessel's helm control on autopilot. During his absence, the WELCOME changed course across the MILLER's bow, and the vessels collided, causing the fishing vessel to sink shortly thereafter at a position below buoy "SC" near the Hood Canal entrance. The MILLER's damage was negligible, but the WELCOME was a total loss estimated at about \$300,000. ^{1/}

The MILLER had been on survey operations from 1030 in the San Juan Islands and had completed its survey work for the day at Burrows Bay, Fidalgo Island. Because it was participating in the Vessel Traffic Services (VTS), as required, the MILLER entered the VTS traffic lanes southbound off Lawson Reef at 1900 bound for Seattle, Washington. The MILLER's master informed the VTS by radio that his ETA at Shilshole Approach Buoy would be midnight. This scheduling shows that the MILLER's master would have been on duty for over 13 hours by the time of arrival. Although the MILLER carried 14 scientists, the vessel had only a four-man crew. The Board feels that the crew manning of the vessel did not allow for a regular navigation watch relief for the master while the MILLER was on extended cruising, and questions whether the vessel's crew complement was adequate for the safety of the vessel and its embarked scientists in an emergency.

The WELCOME, following the movements of another fishing vessel, preceded the MILLER into Admiralty Inlet. Although the WELCOME was not participating in the VTS and was not required to, the vessel entered the traffic lanes and crossed the path of the MILLER. The MILLER's master slowed his vessel and allowed the WELCOME to proceed ahead, as required by the rules of the road. The MILLER's

^{1/} For more information, read "Marine Accident Report--R/V DON J. MILLER II Collision with the F/V WELCOME, Admiralty Inlet, Puget Sound, October 25, 1978 (NTSB-MAR-79-14).

master then increased the speed and left the pilothouse and went to the galley, leaving the helm unattended on autopilot and without posting a lookout. During his absence, the WELCOME altered its course across the MILLER's bow. The WELCOME's helmsmen did not check the location of the MILLER prior to altering course nor did the WELCOME have a proper lookout. Although both vessels were equipped with VHF/FM radio transceivers, neither attempted to communicate its maneuvering intentions to the other.

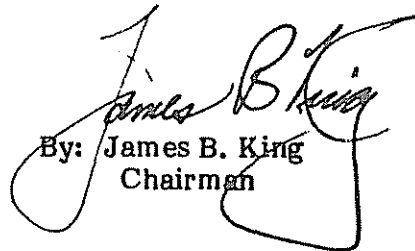
Although the vessels of the USGS and other U.S. Government agencies are not required by law to be inspected by the U.S. Coast Guard, whenever such vessels become involved in accidents which are caused by inadequate or improper equipment, poor maintenance procedures, or unsafe operation because of inadequate manning or training, it becomes a matter of concern to the Safety Board. U.S. Government vessels should set the example for proper vessel operation, maintenance, and seamanship. Several U.S. Government agencies, including the U.S. Navy Military Sealift Command, have found it desirable to have the U.S. Coast Guard conduct regular examinations to insure that their vessels at least approximate the standards for similar commercial vessels.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior:

Arrange with the U.S. Coast Guard for an examination of the R/V DON J. MILLER II to determine the extent to which she conforms to the minimum manning and other regulations applicable to privately operated vessels of the same type and size engaged in similar oceanographic operations with embarked scientists, and if necessary, consider taking action to bring the vessel into reasonable conformance with the standards prescribed by regulations for privately operated research vessels. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-79-100)

Enter into an agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard to have USGS vessels regularly examined by the Coast Guard to determine if they meet the standards prescribed by regulations for privately operated research vessels of similar type and service, and initiate a program to bring the vessels into reasonable conformance with these standards. (Class III, Longer Term Action) (M-79-101)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: James B. King
Chairman