

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: June 25, 1979

 Forwarded to:

Mr. W.A. Klein
 Assistant Vice President
 Seahorse, Inc.
 P.O. Box 968
 Morgan City, Louisiana 70380

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-79-70 and -71

After loading a cargo of pipe, tools, drill water, diesel fuel oil, and various other supplies, the offshore supply vessel M/V SABINE SEAHORSE departed Intracoastal City, Louisiana about 2200 on January 29, 1978 for South Marsh Island block 128 in the Gulf of Mexico. By 0030 on January 31, the vessel was secured starboard side to Pennzoil's Platform A in block 128. The vessel was docked at the platform's east side boat landing, which was fitted with four docking bumpers. The fenders were missing from the bumper near the vessel's engineroom, and the bumper was not attached to its underwater support. The SABINE SEAHORSE struck the bumper hard while redocking after a mooring line broke. The vessel's wing compartments, engineroom, and forward passageway flooded, and the SABINE SEAHORSE sank about 0600. No persons died, but the vessel, valued at \$220,000 was lost. 1/

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the accident was the breaching of the vessel's hull by a damaged docking bumper's lower support, which led to flooding of the vessel's engineroom, wing compartments, and forward passageway due to the failure of the crew to secure the engineroom's watertight doors and to take damage control action. Contributing to the accident was the apparent malfunction of the high bilge water alarm.

Typical supply vessel operations require frequent mooring to oil platforms. During these operations, the risk of hull damage is high. Accordingly, watertight doors should be kept closed to isolate flooding which may occur because of minor damage. Seahorse, Inc.'s "Damage Control Guide" properly indicated that watertight doors should be kept closed, but there is no indication that the importance of this instruction was emphasized to the engineer. In fact, the engineer testified that his knowledge of this company policy came only from conversations with other Seahorse, Inc., employees. All of the engineroom's watertight doors were closed when the vessel initially proceeded offshore, which indicates

1/ For more detailed information, read "Marine Accident Report -- Sinking of the Offshore Supply Vessel M/V SABINE SEAHORSE in the Gulf of Mexico, January 31, 1978" (NTSB-MAR-79-10).

that the engineer complied with the company policy as he understood it. Had clear instructions been properly given, a prudent engineer would have followed them. The Safety Board concludes that Seahorse, Inc., should make additional efforts to insure that its instructions about closing watertight doors are absolutely clear and well understood by its supply vessel crews.

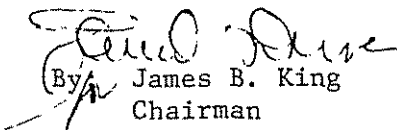
The cause for the apparent malfunction of the high bilge water alarm could not be determined. However, if the alarm had been tested before the SABINE SEAHORSE departed Intracoastal City, repairs could have been made if necessary. If the alarm had functioned properly, the flooding of the engineroom would have been discovered earlier, and it may have been possible to control the flooding before it reached a dangerous level.

As a result of its analysis of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that Seahorse, Inc.:

Instruct Seahorse, Inc.'s offshore supply vessel crews to keep all watertight doors closed at all times except when actually being transited. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-79-70)

Instruct Seahorse, Inc.'s offshore supply vessel engineers to test the operation of high bilge water alarms before each voyage. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-79-71)

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


By James B. King
Chairman