



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Log M-349

Date: December 15, 1988

In reply refer to: M-88-66 through -68

Mr. Bill Paulos
Vice-President-General Manager
Colorado Belle Hotel and Casino
P.O. Box 2304
Laughlin, Nevada 89029

At 2128 on July 12, 1988, the 28-foot passenger vessel EDGEWATER #5, owned and operated by the Edgewater Hotel and Casino, left the owner's small passenger vessel pier on the Colorado River at Laughlin, Nevada, with approximately 25 passengers and 1 operator on board. Soon after the vessel left the pier, its engine stalled. While the operator attempted to start the engine, the EDGEWATER #5 drifted downriver about 60 feet because of a strong current, struck the protruding bow ramp of the moored passenger vessel LITTLE BELLE, and capsized. The operator and one passenger from the EDGEWATER #5 boarded the LITTLE BELLE as the EDGEWATER #5 capsized. Other passengers were dumped into the river and either swam ashore, were rescued by boats in the area, or were pulled aboard the LITTLE BELLE and onto the pier where the LITTLE BELLE was moored. An unknown number of bystanders jumped into the river to assist in the rescue. Emergency medical technicians treated 29 persons on scene for near drowning, hypothermia, and multiple abrasions. Twenty persons were taken to Bullhead City (Arizona) Community Hospital, and 3 persons were admitted to the hospital overnight for observation. The EDGEWATER #5 was destroyed. The LITTLE BELLE was not damaged, and no one on board was injured in the collision.

The LITTLE BELLE was moored at the Edgewater Hotel and Casino's downriver pier with its protruding bow ramp pointing upriver toward the small passenger vessel pier. The National Transportation Safety Board is concerned that unless vessels with a bow protrusion are prohibited from mooring at the face of the downriver pier, a similar accident involving a vessel using the Edgewater Hotel and Casino's small passenger vessel pier might occur if the vessel loses power and drifts as the EDGEWATER #5 did.

The Edgewater Hotel and Casino employs 13 vessel operators to run its small passenger vessels. Eleven of the operators had valid U.S. Coast Guard licenses as required by each vessel's Certificate of Inspection. The operator of the EDGEWATER #5 was one of two operators who had an expired license. The Safety Board believes that the vessel owner should monitor the license status of its vessel

operators, and prohibit vessel operation by anyone not licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Because the EDGEWATER #5 was destroyed and only a small portion of the lifesaving equipment was recovered after the accident, the Safety Board inspected three of the remaining seven similar vessels operated by the Edgewater Hotel and Casino. This inspection revealed that some of the safety equipment required by the Coast Guard was either missing or inoperative. The EDGEWATER #6 had 22 of the required 30 personal flotation devices (PFDs) and one of the three required child PFDs. The EDGEWATER #7 had two of the three required child PFDs, and the waterlight attached to a ring buoy did not operate because its battery was dead. The EDGEWATER #10 had one of the four required child PFDs, and the waterlight attached to a ring buoy did not operate because its battery was dead. The Safety Board concludes that these deficiencies indicate that the inspection and maintenance program for the vessels was inadequate.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Colorado Belle Hotel and Casino:

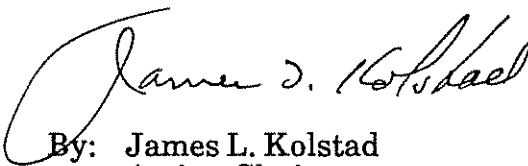
Prohibit vessels with a bow protrusion similar to the LITTLE BELLE's from mooring at the face of its downriver pier. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-88-66)

Monitor the license status of vessel operators, and prohibit operation of its certificated vessels by anyone not licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-88-67)

Inspect the safety equipment on all its vessels frequently, and maintain the equipment in good operable condition. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-88-68)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "... to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations M-88-66 through -68 in your reply.

KOLSTAD, Acting Chairman, and BURNETT, LAUBER, NALL, and DICKINSON, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: James L. Kolstad
Acting Chairman