



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: December 30, 2002

In reply refer to: M-02-31

Mr. John Groundwater
Executive Director
Passenger Vessel Association
801 North Quincy Street, Suite 200
Arlington, Virginia 22203

The National Transportation Safety Board (Safety Board) is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating transportation accidents, determining their probable cause, and making recommendations to prevent similar accidents from occurring. We are providing the following information to urge you to take action on the safety recommendation in this letter. The Safety Board is vitally interested in this recommendation because it is designed to prevent accidents and save lives.

The recommendation addresses the adequacy of lifejacket distribution on small passenger vessels. The recommendation derives from the Safety Board's investigation of the collision between the U.S. Coast Guard patrol boat *CG242513* and the small passenger vessel *Bayside Blaster* in Biscayne Bay, Florida, on January 12, 2002, and is consistent with the evidence we found and the analysis we performed.¹ As a result of the investigation, the Safety Board has issued safety recommendations to the Coast Guard, Boatrides International, Inc. (owner of the *Bayside Blaster*), and the Passenger Vessel Association. The Safety Board would appreciate a response from you within 90 days addressing actions you have taken or intend to take to implement our recommendation.

Based on its investigation, the Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the collision between the *CG242513* and the *Bayside Blaster* was the failure of the coxswain of the Coast Guard patrol boat to operate his vessel at a safe speed in a restricted-speed area frequented by small passenger vessels and in conditions of limited visibility due to darkness and background lighting. Contributing to the cause of the accident was the lack of adequate Coast Guard oversight of nonstandard boat operations.

In the course of its investigation, the Safety Board found that the adult-size lifejackets stowed in lockers at the *Bayside Blaster's* bow were difficult to retrieve, and that no lifejackets were stowed in the aft accommodation area. The vessel's child-size

¹ For further information, read National Transportation Safety Board, *Collision Between the U.S. Coast Guard Patrol Boat CG242513 and the U.S. Small Passenger Vessel Bayside Blaster, Biscayne Bay, Florida, January 12, 2002*, Marine Accident Report NTSB/MAR-02/05 (Washington, DC: NTSB, 2002).

lifejackets were stored in a compartment at the operator's station, but the opening mechanism was broken and had to be pried open. Both the single stowage location of adult lifejackets and the broken opening mechanism on the child lifejacket stowage compartment delayed the distribution of lifejackets to all passengers. Fortunately, the delay did not affect the outcome of the accident. Under different circumstances, however, the delay in distributing lifejackets could have had serious consequences.

Small passenger vessels such as the *Bayside Blaster* that carry 150 or fewer passengers or have overnight accommodations for 49 or fewer passengers are required by Title 46 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) part 180.78 to have lifejackets "stored in convenient places distributed throughout accommodation spaces." (The same regulation is found at 46 CFR 117.78 for small passenger vessels that carry more than 150 passengers or more than 49 overnight passengers.) The CFR further requires that "each lifejacket kept in a storage container must be readily available."

The Safety Board is concerned that the lifejacket problems identified on the *Bayside Blaster* may not be unique to that vessel and that the owners of other small passenger vessels need to be reminded of the safety standards. More than 350 vessel owners and operators of small passenger vessels, or about 65 percent of the owner-operators nationwide, belong to the Passenger Vessel Association. The Safety Board is aware that an objective of the association is to help its member companies improve the safety of their passenger vessel operations and that the association has published risk management and training manuals for that purpose. The risk management manual contains a section on signage for lifesaving equipment that covers marking lifejacket lockers but not the Federal requirement for storing lifejackets in convenient places and distributing them throughout accommodation spaces.

Stowage of lifejackets on small passenger vessels was an issue in the Safety Board's recent investigation of the November 2000 fire on board the *Port Imperial Manhattan*.² After that accident, the owner of the *Port Imperial Manhattan*, New York Waterway, voluntarily elected to modify lifejacket stowage on its vessels. Lifejackets on New York Waterway vessels are now stowed under the passenger seats. The Safety Board is aware that the Coast Guard approved the original stowage arrangements for lifejackets on the *Bayside Blaster*, and that the same was true of New York Waterway vessels before the *Port Imperial Manhattan* fire. Nevertheless, the Safety Board believes that the owners of small passenger vessels should consider voluntarily reconfiguring the way lifejackets are stowed to make them more readily available to passengers.

The National Transportation Safety Board, therefore, makes the following safety recommendation to the Passenger Vessel Association:

² For further information, see National Transportation Safety Board, *Fire On Board the Small Passenger Vessel Port Imperial Manhattan, Hudson River, New York City, New York, November 17, 2000*, Marine Accident Report NTSB/MAR-02/02 (Washington, DC: NTSB, 2002).

Include in your *Risk Management Manual* the information that lifejackets on small passenger vessels should be evenly distributed throughout passenger areas for immediate use in an emergency, as prescribed by 46 CFR 117.78 or 180.78. (M-02-31)

In your response to the recommendation in this letter, please refer to M-02-31. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6177.

Acting Chairman CARMODY and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in this recommendation.

By: Carol J. Carmody
Acting Chairman