

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

SP-20
Log M-306

ISSUED: December 17, 1985

Forwarded to:

Mr. Patrick R. Tyson
Assistant Secretary of Labor for
Occupational Safety and Health Administration
Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-85-116

During the early morning hours of October 17, 1984, the AMAY S, a 64-foot-long, self-propelled lift boat, became disabled when it lost propulsion and electrical power while en route to Sabine Pass, Texas, from an offshore oil drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico. The master radioed the U.S. Coast Guard requesting assistance, and the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter POINT HOPE was dispatched to assist. About 0830 c.s.t., the POINT HOPE arrived on scene, and by 0917, the cutter had the AMAY S in tow bound for Sabine Pass. About 15 minutes after the tow was commenced, the AMAY S suddenly rolled to starboard, capsized, and sank. All seven persons on board the AMAY S were rescued by the POINT HOPE, but the vessel was not salvageable and has been declared a total loss. The loss was valued at \$600,000. ^{1/}

There are approximately 150 self-elevating lift boats like the AMAY S which operate in the Gulf of Mexico off the United States coast. Newer, larger lift boats may be capable of operating up to 25 miles offshore in the Gulf of Mexico and have accommodations for up to 42 workers. Lift boats are of novel design and have operating characteristics that are unlike conventional seagoing vessels. These vessels operate at sea for protracted periods of time during which many industrial workers may be exposed to serious risks. The only Federal safety regulations applicable to such vessels are contained in 46 CFR Parts 24 through 26. These regulations set forth the minimum number of life preservers, ring life buoys, and portable fire extinguishers that the vessel must carry.

The self-elevating lift boat is, in essence, a mobile industrial facility. It provides a work platform and/or living quarters for industrial workers. Workers not only are exposed to the normally encountered risks that are present in the workplace ashore, but also are vulnerable to the hazards of the sea. These workers are not trained as seamen and generally are not prepared for emergencies that are likely to occur at sea. However, no safety regulations specifically designed to protect these workers are being enforced by any Federal regulatory body.

^{1/} For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--"Capsizing of the U.S. Self-Propelled Lift Boat AMAY S While Under Tow of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter POINT HOPE, Gulf of Mexico, October 17, 1984" (NTSB/MAR-85/10).

Under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, the Coast Guard has the authority to promulgate safety regulations to protect industrial workers on lift boats on the outer continental shelf; however, it has not done so. Even if the Coast Guard had promulgated such regulations, they would be in effect only while the vessel was actually operating on waters over the outer continental shelf, and these vessels operate frequently in State-controlled waters.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has general statutory authority to regulate safety in the workplace throughout the United States (including State-controlled waters) and its territories and possessions. In the past, the agency has exercised regulatory authority over uninspected commercial vessels where the Coast Guard has not exercised authority. Since the Coast Guard lacks the authority to regulate these vessels under the general vessel statutes in State-controlled waters, the Safety Board believes that OSHA should establish and enforce safety regulations which set forth lifesaving and firefighting equipment requirements to protect industrial workers carried on uninspected lift boats that operate solely in State-controlled waters.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration:

Establish and enforce safety regulations which set forth lifesaving and firefighting equipment requirements to protect industrial workers employed on uninspected self-elevating lift boats that operate solely on State-controlled waters. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-85-116)

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 actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation M-85-116 in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and BURSLEY, Member, concurred in this recommendation.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman