

the towing vessel M/V MARJORIE McALLISTER, released June 29, 1971. The sinking of the JOAN ELLIS is the ninth such uninspected vessel casualty noted by the Safety Board.

The loss of the two crewmembers trapped in their quarters might have been avoided if the vessel had been equipped with a general alarm. The rescue of the master, pilot, and deckhand was made possible primarily by a waterproof light which floated within reach of the master and enabled him to signal the passing towing vessel GRAMPUS. It is probable that one or more of the survivors might have drowned before they could have been seen in daylight.

In this case, all three of the crewmembers who managed to get off the vessel before it sank were seen and picked up by the passing M/V GRAMPUS. However, under similar circumstances, the availability of an inflatable liferaft would greatly increase the chances of survival for persons in the water.

PROBABLE CAUSE

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of this sinking was flooding of the two aftermost compartments through deck manholes, resulting in settling of the stern and the ultimate massive flooding of the engineroom through open deck doors. Contributing to the casualty were: the strain imposed by the towing hawser when the vessel turned to starboard and increased speed; the splashing of waves from the barge over the stern; the inadequate freeboard; the inadequate bilge system; the non-watertight manhole covers; the low sills under weather deck doors; the galley deck level which is a foot lower than the main deck; and the absence of stop valves in the drains from the fresh water compartment and galley into the engineroom bilges. Loss of life might have been prevented if the vessel had been equipped with a general alarm system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Transportation Safety Board concurs in the recommendations of the Coast Guard Marine Board of Investigation and the Commandant's action thereon. We strongly support the legislation which is being considered by the Congress which would require the licensing of persons in charge of the navigation of towing vessels. In addition, the Safety Board reaffirms its previous recommendations concerning offshore towing vessels and the need for an analysis of towing vessel casualties in inland waters to determine the need for legislation requiring inspection of all towing vessels. M-71-30

The Safety Board further recommends that the Coast Guard analyze casualty reports of towing vessels to evaluate the need for regulations requiring inflatable liferafts of sufficient capacity to accommodate all persons on board. M-71-31

BY THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD:

Adopted this 23rd day of September 1971:

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John H. Reed, Chairman

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