



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Log M-351A

Date: February 1, 1989

In reply refer to: M-89-9 and -10

Mr. Frank R. Ahlbin
Vice President
Guest Company, Inc.
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On January 18, 1988, the fishing vessel WAYWARD WIND with six crewmembers arrived about 25 miles south of Kodiak Island, Alaska. A crewmember then notified the captain that the after deck was under water. The captain ordered the deckhand to tell the crew to don exposure suits, and the mate on watch sent a distress message to the U.S. Coast Guard. The captain attempted to pump one or more compartments, but the vessel continued to sink by the stern, and the captain recognized that the vessel could not be saved. After the crew had donned their exposure suits, they entered the water. The captain's wife took the vessel's class B emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB), Guest Model 630, with her into the water. The vessel sank stern first about 1/2 hour after the crew entered the water.

Alerted by the distress message, a Coast Guard C-130 aircraft arrived at the search area, located the source of the EPIRB signal, and dropped flares to mark the location of the signal. Later, a Coast Guard helicopter found the captain's wife and the deckhand. The bodies of the remaining four crewmembers were recovered a few hours later by the fishing vessel, COUGAR. The estimated value of the WAYWARD WIND was \$500,000.¹

The class B EPIRB, which the owner of the WAYWARD WIND voluntarily had on board, transmitted its distress signal on the proper frequency once it was activated by the crewmember. The C-130 pilot reported that the EPIRB signal was weak; this was probably due to the fact that the vessel owner had allowed the battery (with a recommended service life of 2 years) to remain in the EPIRB more than 10 months beyond the recommended battery change date. Nonetheless, the C-130 was able to detect and locate the EPIRB when it approached the position reported by

¹For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--*Sinking of the U.S. Fishing Vessel Wayward Wind in the Gulf of Alaska, Kodiak Island, Alaska, January 18, 1988* (NTSB/MAR-89/01).

the WAYWARD WIND. The National Transportation Safety Board believes that in this case, the EPIRB transmitted effectively and its use saved two lives.

An examination of the EPIRB revealed that it would not float upright as assembled, but floated on its side with its antenna in the water. Removal of a styrofoam spacer under the battery allowed the battery to settle lower in the EPIRB and the EPIRB then floated upright. Operating instructions obtained from the manufacturer after the accident clearly showed that the styrofoam spacer should be placed on top of the battery. However, there might be occasions when changing the battery that the directions are not readily available. Also, this case illustrates how easy it is to assemble this model EPIRB incorrectly and to destroy its capability to float upright and transmit the distress signal. Directions for installing batteries in battery-operated items ranging from children's toys to complicated electronic equipment commonly are embossed or bonded on such devices. The Safety Board believes that an item of vital safety equipment like an EPIRB should have the directions for installing the battery embossed or bonded on the EPIRB and that the directions should carry a prominent warning that the battery must be connected before placing the EPIRB in service. Further, the manufacturers of the EPIRBs should design their EPIRBs so that the battery can be installed only in the correct manner, and the EPIRB will float upright and able to transmit on the proper distress frequency.

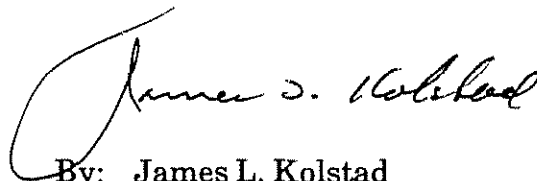
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that Guest Company, Inc.:

Emboss or bond directions on emergency position indicating radio beacons (EPIRBs) manufactured by your company showing how to install the battery and include a prominent warning that the battery must be connected before the EPIRB is placed in service. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-89-9)

Design emergency position indicating radio beacons (EPIRBs) manufactured by your company so that the battery can be installed only in the correct manner, that the EPIRBs intended for use on vessels will float upright, and that the EPIRB will be able to transmit on the proper distress frequency. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-89-10)

Also, as a result of its investigation, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations M-89-1 through -5 to the U.S. Coast Guard, M-89-6 through -8 to the Federal Communications Commission, and M-89-11 to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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



By: James L. Kolstad
Acting Chairman