

Log M-326A



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

**Date:** April 24, 1987

**In reply refer to:** M-87-15 and -16

Mr. Martin Gould, President  
Board of New Orleans-Baton Rouge Steamship  
Pilot Commissioners for the Mississippi River  
2101 Williams Boulevard, Suite B  
Kenner, Louisiana 70062

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On June 23, 1986, the 674-foot-long, British-registered bulk carrier M/V PALM PRIDE departed Burnside Terminal, Louisiana, at 0154 and proceeded downbound in the Mississippi River. At 0444 while attempting to overtake two downbound tows that were in an overtaking situation, the PALM PRIDE collided with barges in the Sioux City & New Orleans barge fleet sited along the right descending river bank in the bend at 26 Mile Point, about mile 122.6 above Head of Passes. Damage to the PALM PRIDE and the barges and their cargoes was estimated at \$1,400,000. There were no injuries reported. <sup>1/</sup>

The Safety Board has investigated numerous accidents in which vessels collided when meeting or overtaking each other in river and channel bends. In this instance the pilot of the PALM PRIDE attempted to overtake two tows abreast at the riverbend off 26 Mile Point and close to barges moored adjacent to the shore. Despite the width of the river at 26 Mile Point, the pilot chose to overtake the tows on their starboard sides while both were proceeding in the right half of the channel, and passing space was limited. When towboats can maintain control and alignment of their tows and there is adequate river-width, passing should not be a problem. However, if control is lost, sudden swinging of a tow may make passing risky. Since towboats may use a flanking or steering maneuver while rounding a bend, more clearance should be allowed when passing in a bend. The Safety Board believes that a greater effort is needed by pilots of large vessels and operators of towboats to avoid vessel encounters at bends where feasible while transiting winding rivers and narrow channels, or to agree to passing arrangements which provide sufficient space between the passing vessels.

The pilot, master, and mate on the PALM PRIDE made use of pilothouse radar, but their observations were not systematic as the vessel proceeded downbound. Since pilots maneuvering vessels on winding rivers must devote most of their time to visual conning, they are often unable to spend time monitoring radar. Therefore, they should use the vessel's watch personnel to monitor the radar. The mate in charge of the bridgeway should be thoroughly familiar with the vessel's radar equipment and should use it to monitor the movements of nearby vessels and to take ranges to navigation aids and landmarks.

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<sup>1/</sup> For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--"Collision of British Bulk Carrier M/V PALM PRIDE with the Sioux City & New Orleans Barge Fleet in the Mississippi River, near the Luling-Destrehan Bridge, June 23, 1986" (NTSB/MAR-87/3).

Inland Navigation Rule 7 states that proper use should be made of radar, and it stipulates the need for systematic observations to obtain early warning of the risk of collision. Had the pilot made regular observations of the radar or asked the mate to do so, he might have realized earlier that a risk of collision with the tows was developing and that some corrective maneuvering was needed.

As the result of its investigations, the Safety Board made three recommendations to require pilots to use the navigation bridgewatch to assist them while piloting. On December 22, 1970, 2/ the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendation M-70-9 to the American Pilots' Association:

Establish a policy whereby their member pilots will request masters of vessels which they are piloting to arrange for the monitoring of ship's radar when available, to assist in collision avoidance, even under conditions of good visibility.

The American Pilots' Association responded that it could not see any reason why pilots could not request the master of the vessels they are piloting to monitor the ship's radar. The Safety Board expected that the pending navigation regulations which would require a radar watch on vessels over 1,600 gross tons in U.S. navigable waters would resolve the problem. Consequently, the Safety Board classified the recommendation as "Closed-No Longer Applicable." However, the PALM PRIDE accident reveals that pilots on the Mississippi River may not be making use of the vessels' personnel to monitor radar.

As a result of its investigation of an accident near Pilottown, Louisiana, on October 3, 1978, 3/ the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendation M-80-7 to the Associated Branch Pilots:

Request member pilots to inform vessel masters concerning the requirements of 33 CFR 164, Navigation Safety Regulations, and advise member pilots to use the navigation bridge watch to keep themselves advised of the vessel's position and speed.

The Associated Branch Pilots responded that this recommendation has been put into effect, and that the pilots were following all of the Safety Board's recommendations. The Safety Board has classified this recommendation as "Closed--Acceptable Action."

As a result of its investigation of an accident near Beaumont, Texas, on February 25, 1979, 4/ the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendation M-80-41 to the Sabine Pilots:

Advise member pilots to review the Navigation Safety Regulations at 33 CFR 164 and urge pilots to make greater use of vessel's bridgewatch and electronic equipment in support of its navigational control while piloting.

2/ For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report—"Collision Involving SS UNION FAITH (Taiwan) and Tug WARREN J. DOUCET and Tow in Mississippi River on April 16, 1969" (NTSB-MAR-70-04).

3/ For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report—"Collision of the S/T TEXACO IOWA and the M/T BURMAH SPAR, on the Mississippi River, Pilottown, Louisiana, October 3, 1978" (NTSB-MAR-80-3).

4/ For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report—"Collision of the S/T MOBIL VIGILANT and the S/T MARINE DUVAL on the Neches River near Beaumont, Texas, February 25, 1979" (NTSB-MAR-80-08).

The Sabine Pilots did not respond to the recommendation. The Safety Board has classified the recommendation as "Closed--Unacceptable Action." The Safety Board maintains that pilots should make effective use of the bridgewatch to ensure the safe navigation of vessels.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Board of New Orleans-Baton Rouge Steamship Pilot Commissioners for the Mississippi River:

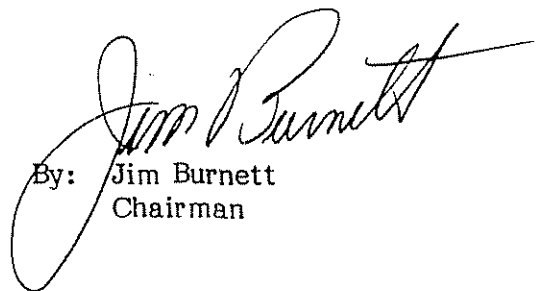
Issue a notice to the association's pilots to encourage them to avoid whenever practicable passing or meeting of tows at river bends, and to exercise extra caution while maneuvering should such encounters occur unexpectedly. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-87-15)

Issue a notice to the association's pilots to encourage them to use the vessels' bridgewatch to perform routine functions that may assist the pilot in maneuvering vessels on the river. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-87-16)

Also as a result of its investigation, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations M-87-13 and -14 to the U.S. Coast Guard.

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 recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations M-87-15 and -16, in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, and LAUBER and NALL, Members concurred in these recommendations. GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, did not participate.

  
By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman