

Roz M-307

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: December 17, 1985

Forwarded to:

Captain W. A. Mayberry  
Director  
Offshore Marine Service Association  
2312 ITM Building  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70130

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)  
M-85-117 through -119

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. <sup>1/</sup>

Lift boats are vessels of unique design and function. In order to perform their function safely, the master must know the maximum deck cargo that the jacking system can lift, the maximum depth of water in which the vessel may be jacked, and the minimum air gap that must be maintained between the bottom of the vessel and the surface of the sea in the jacked-up mode. Additionally, the master should know the maximum wind and sea conditions in which the jacking system may be operated, and should be provided with instructions concerning actions to be taken when weather and sea conditions deteriorate while the vessel is in the jacked-up mode. The master of the AMAY S was not provided with any of this information concerning his vessel's operational limitations.

Vessel owners and operators have a responsibility to outfit their vessels so that they are safe for the operation intended, and the absence of regulations does not relieve them of this responsibility. Vessels that navigate at sea and remain at sea for protracted periods must be outfitted so that normal routines may be conducted without needlessly endangering the vessels or the personnel on board the vessels. In addition to basic navigation and communication equipment, these vessels should be equipped with such

<sup>1/</sup> 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).

items as fuel gauges, hand leads, fathometers, and anchor handling equipment. None of these items of equipment are considered to be emergency equipment, but their use on a vessel can mitigate emergency situations that may arise while a vessel is at sea. The AMAY S was not required by regulations to carry these items and did not have any of them on board. While the lack of this equipment had no direct impact upon the capsizing of the vessel, it did reduce the options for action that the master might have been able to take after the vessel became disabled. For instance, if the AMAY S had been outfitted with an anchor and anchor handling equipment, the master could have dropped the anchor and the vessel might not have drifted around aimlessly for hours, during which time it was vulnerable to grounding and to collision with other vessels in the area. This accident illustrates the need for the owners and operators of lift boats that operate in other than protected waters to review vessel outfitting to insure that vessels are properly equipped for their intended services.

Despite the fact that current regulations do not require that lift boat masters be licensed, maritime law and tradition hold that a vessel is not seaworthy unless it is properly manned. Owners and operators have a responsibility to man their vessels with persons suitably qualified for the intended operation. The Safety Board, therefore, urges owners and operators of lift boats that operate offshore to provide the necessary training to the masters of such vessels to insure that they are operated in a seaworthy manner.

Therefore, as a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Offshore Marine Services Association:

Recommend to member companies which operate self-elevating lift boats in offshore areas that they provide vessel masters with operating manuals which set forth operating instructions and operating limitations for the vessels, including the maximum deck cargo that the jacking system can lift, the maximum depth of water in which the vessel may be jacked, the minimum air gap that must be maintained between the bottom of the vessel and the surface of the sea, the maximum wind and sea conditions in which the jacking system may be operated, and instructions as to actions to be taken when weather and sea conditions deteriorate while the vessel is in the jacked-up mode. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-85-117)

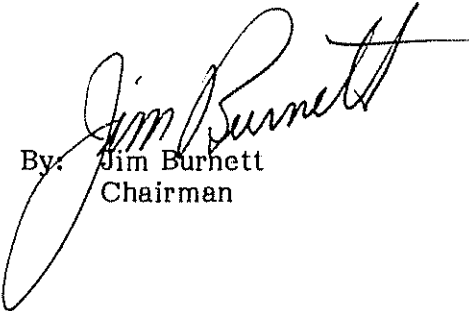
Develop for use by member companies recommended minimum outfit standards for lift boats operating in offshore areas in the Gulf of Mexico for vessel control and navigation equipment, such as anchors, anchor handling equipment, fathometers, hand leads, and fuel gauges. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-85-118)

Urge member companies that operate lift boats in offshore areas to provide vessel masters with the necessary training to be able to operate their vessels in a seaworthy manner. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-85-119)

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 recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations M-85-117 through -119 in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and BURSLEY, Member, concurred in these recommendations.

By:  Jim Burnett  
Chairman