

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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M-89A

ISSUED: April 11, 1979

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Forwarded to:

Mr. James V. Guthrie  
Chairman  
Board of Examiners of Maryland Pilots  
1316 South Baylis Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21224

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-79-38

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At 2107 e.d.t. on October 20, 1978, the Argentine freighter M/V SANTA CRUZ II and the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter CUYAHOGA collided in the Chesapeake Bay at the mouth of the Potomac River, Maryland. As a result of this collision, the CUYAHOGA sank. Eleven Coast Guardsmen were killed; 18 Coast Guardsmen were rescued by the SANTA CRUZ II, which experienced minor damage. 1/

About 20 minutes prior to the collision, the Maryland pilot aboard the SANTA CRUZ II correctly determined that the two vessels were in a head-and-head meeting situation and that a normal port-to-port passage would take place. However, he concluded that the closest point of approach (CPA) would be about 1,000 yards and that, therefore, whistle signals or bridge-to-bridge radiotelephone communication with the CUYAHOGA were not necessary.

The pilot did not plot the relative motion or determine the course, speed or CPA of the CUYAHOGA, nor did the pilot request any crewmember of the SANTA CRUZ II to perform these tasks. A relative motion plot would have shown that the CPA of the two vessels would be about 600 yards.

The Pilot Rules for Inland Waters state that whistle signals are to be exchanged when two vessels will pass within 1,000 yards of each other. As the vessels closed, the pilot should have realized that the vessels would have a CPA of less than 1,000 yards and should have sounded a one-blast signal. Whistle signals prior to the CUYAHOGA turning 3 minutes before the collision would have alerted the Commanding Officer

1/ For more detailed information, read "Marine Accident Report -- Collision of Argentine Freighter M/V SANTA CRUZ II and U.S. Coast Guard Cutter CUYAHOGA in the Chesapeake Bay at the mouth of the Potomac River, Maryland, October 20, 1978" (NTSB-MAR-79-3)

of the CUYAHOGA to the intentions of the SANTA CRUZ II. However, the pilot of the SANTA CRUZ II stated that it is not uncommon for Maryland pilots to forego the whistle signals in normal head-and-head meeting situations even when the estimated CPA is less than 1,000 yards.

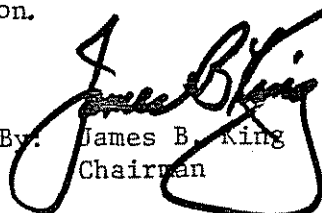
Therefore, The National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Board of Examiners of Maryland Pilots:

Insure that Maryland Pilots comply with Section 33 CFR 80.3(a) of the Pilot Rules for Inland Waters which states:

The signals for passing, by the blowing of the whistle, shall be given and answered by pilots, in compliance with the rules in this part, not only when meeting head and head, or nearly so, but at all times when the steam vessels are in sight of each other, when passing or meeting at a distance within half a mile of each other, and whether passing to the starboard or port.

(Class II, Priority Action) (M-79-38)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS and HOGUE, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.

By:   
James B. King  
Chairman