



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: August 19, 2008

In reply refer to: M-08-10

Captain Henry G. Shows, Jr.
President
Board of New Orleans–Baton Rouge Steamship
Pilot Examiners for the Mississippi River
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Metairie, Louisiana 70006

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating transportation accidents, determining their probable cause, and making recommendations to prevent similar accidents from occurring. We are providing the following information to urge you to take action on the safety recommendation in this letter. The Safety Board is vitally interested in the recommendation because it is designed to prevent accidents and save lives.

The recommendation addresses pilotage at berths along the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge that pose challenges in docking or undocking large vessels. The recommendation derives from the Safety Board's investigation of the February 10, 2007, accident in which the Bahamas-registered tankship *M/V Kition* allided with the Interstate Highway 10 (I-10) bridge at Baton Rouge and is consistent with the evidence we found and the analysis we performed.¹

About 0730 on February 10, 2007, a Louisiana state pilot moved the *Kition* away from Apex Oil Company dock No. 2 (the Apex dock) on the west bank of the Mississippi River, just upriver of the I-10 bridge at Baton Rouge, in preparation for a voyage downriver to the Gulf of Mexico and the open ocean. The pilot used three tugs, one pulling on the bow and two pushing on the stern, to turn the vessel around so as to head downriver.

When the nearly 800-foot-long vessel was approximately parallel to the bridge, the second officer warned that the bow was about to hit the bridge pier. The master and the pilot ordered the engine to full astern, but about 3 minutes later, the *Kition's* underwater hull (bulbous

¹ For further information, see *Allision of Bahamas-Registered Tankship M/V Kition with Interstate Highway 10 Bridge Pier, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, February 10, 2007*, Marine Accident Report NTSB/MAR-08/02 (Washington, DC: NTSB, 2008). The report will be available on the Safety Board's website at the following address: <http://www.nts.gov/publictn/2008/MAR0803.htm>.

bow) struck the fender system around the pier. The fender system began to collapse, forcing the tug at the bow to let go of its line and back clear. Moments later, the starboard bow of the *Kition* struck the bridge pier, knocking out a 2- to 3-foot section of concrete. The accident did not affect the safety of the bridge but caused an estimated \$8 million in damage to the pier. The *Kition* sustained hull damage estimated at \$726,500. No one was injured, and no pollution resulted from the accident.

The Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the *Kition*'s allision with the I-10 bridge at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was the pilot's attempt to execute the high-risk maneuver of turning at the dock immediately above the bridge rather than moving the vessel downriver through the bridge before turning or taking it well upriver, then turning.

According to the master, the pilot told him that it was standard procedure to turn at the dock. The pilot told investigators that going upriver was not an option because of a wrecked barge that would make it unsafe to turn a deep-draft vessel such as the *Kition*. The Safety Board found no evidence of a wrecked barge. Moreover, before getting under way, the pilot radioed other mariners in the area that he planned to maneuver the *Kition* crossways in the channel at the bridge. The Safety Board determined that the pilot's plan was to turn the vessel from the dock, and that his actions were consistent with that plan.

The director of operations of the Port Authority of Baton Rouge told investigators that large vessels normally move downriver of the I-10 bridge and then turn, although they also go upriver before turning. The Apex terminal manager stated that large ships are taken either upriver or downriver and turned, but that they do not turn from the dock. The Safety Board found that attempting to turn the vessel from the dock was an unusual, unsafe course of action that demonstrated poor judgment on the pilot's part.

Turning the *Kition* from the dock exposed it to two grave risks: first, that the bow would allide with the bridge pier, and second, that the stern would strike the dock. The bridge's navigation span offered about 1,100 feet of horizontal clearance, leaving a margin of error for the *Kition* of only 300 feet, apportioned between the bow and stern. Therefore, once the *Kition* pilot had committed to turning at the dock, it was critical for him to control any headway that would bring the bow close to the bridge pier.

Although the pilot reduced engine speed and reversed the engine, his actions did not bring the vessel's forward motion under control, and the *Kition* continued to move slowly across the river. According to video evidence, the vessel's stern was more than 300 feet from the dock at the time of the accident, which should have alerted the pilot that the bow was perilously close to the bridge pier. The Safety Board found that the pilot failed to recognize the risk of an allision and did not exhibit the ship-handling skills necessary to avoid the accident.

The *Kition* pilot had not departed from the Apex dock before. The Safety Board concluded that his inexperience in piloting a ship away from the Apex dock adversely affected his judgment about how to safely maneuver the vessel in that challenging area. The *United States*

Coast Pilot specifically warns about the danger of striking the I-10 bridge pier when leaving the Apex dock:²

Mariners departing Greater Baton Rouge Port Commission Dock No. 2 are advised to use extreme caution when turning vessels downstream. Strong currents associated with high water have caused vessels departing this facility to be set down upon the fender system of the Interstate Route 10 fixed highway bridge causing extensive damages. The New Orleans–Baton Rouge Steamship Pilots report that currents in excess of 7 knots have been observed. Mariners should consider moving vessels well above or below the bridge before turning downstream.

A pilot departing from the Apex dock should be familiar with the *Coast Pilot* warning and should know that turning below the bridge or well upriver are the acceptable methods of safely turning around. After conducting a hearing in connection with the *Kition* accident, the Board of New Orleans–Baton Rouge Steamship Pilot Examiners for the Mississippi River required additional training for the *Kition* pilot and recommended that state pilots not turn vessels above the I-10 bridge. The Safety Board is concerned, however, that other Louisiana state pilots may lack knowledge about docking and undocking at the Apex dock or at others that pose challenges for large vessels. Therefore, the Safety Board believes that the Board of New Orleans–Baton Rouge Steamship Pilot Examiners for the Mississippi River should take the following action:

Verify that the pilots assigned to challenging locations such as the Apex dock have received adequate training in docking and undocking large vessels at such locations. (M-08-10)

As a result of its investigation of the *Kition* accident, the Safety Board also issued recommendations to the U.S. Coast Guard. The Board would appreciate a response from you within 90 days, addressing actions you have taken or intend to take to implement its recommendation. In your response, please refer to Safety Recommendation M-08-10. If you would like to submit your response electronically rather than in hard copy, you may send it to the following e-mail address: correspondence@ntsb.gov. If your response includes attachments that exceed 5 megabytes, please e-mail us asking for instructions on how to use our Tumbleweed secure mailbox procedures. To avoid confusion, please use only one method of submission (that is, do not submit both an electronic copy and a hard copy of the same response letter).

Acting Chairman ROSENKER, Vice Chairman SUMWALT, and Members HERSMAN, HIGGINS, and CHEALANDER concurred in this recommendation.

[*Original Signed*]

By: Mark V. Rosenker
Acting Chairman

² National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Ocean Service, *United States Coast Pilot*, vol. 5 (Gulf of Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Virgin Islands), 2004 mid-year update, p. 441.