



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: August 19, 2008

In reply refer to: M-08-8 and -9

Admiral Thad W. Allen
Commandant
U.S. Coast Guard
Washington, D.C. 20593-0001

About 0730 on February 10, 2007, a Louisiana state pilot moved the nearly 800-foot-long Bahamas-registered tankship *M/V Kition* away from the Apex Oil dock on the west bank of the Mississippi River, just upriver of the Interstate Highway 10 (I-10) bridge at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The move was 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 vessel was approximately parallel to the bridge, the second officer warned that its bow was about to hit the bridge pier. The master and pilot ordered the engine to full astern, but about 3 minutes later, the *Kition's* underwater hull (bulbous 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.¹

The National Transportation 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.

The Safety Board found that U.S. Coast Guard policy regarding timely postaccident alcohol testing by Coast Guard personnel was not followed in the *Kition* accident. The pilot of the *Kition* and the masters and crews of the three tugboats were tested for alcohol and drugs

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>.

within 5 hours of the accident. All results were negative. The master, three deck officers, and deck crewmembers of the *Kition* were tested for both alcohol and drugs. The drug tests for the *Kition* crew were negative, but the alcohol tests were invalid because the samples were taken more than 15 hours after the accident.²

The Coast Guard investigator who boarded the vessel 3 hours after the accident said that he observed the crew's performance and saw no indication of alcohol impairment. The *Kition* crewmembers were involved in maneuvering the damaged vessel to a safe anchorage, and the Coast Guard investigator told the Safety Board that he had felt it would not be prudent to conduct alcohol testing until the vessel was secure.³ Although the Safety Board found no evidence that alcohol played a role in the accident, the Board also determined that the *Kition* master, chief officer, and helmsman could have been tested for alcohol during breaks in the anchoring operation if those involved had understood that it was necessary.

Ten years before the new postaccident testing regulations became effective in June 2006, a Safety Board special investigation⁴ found that postaccident testing was accomplished in less than half the cases studied. The changes that went into effect in 2006 clarified the postaccident testing regulations, and guidance on the revised regulations has been made available. Nevertheless, the Coast Guard investigator who boarded the *Kition* after the accident did not insist on alcohol testing, even though he carried a breath-testing device. He also did not ascertain whether the vessel carried saliva kits for alcohol testing.

The Coast Guard concurred with an earlier Safety Board recommendation (Safety Recommendation M-98-73) that Coast Guard personnel should conduct alcohol testing when the marine employer cannot do so. Furthermore, Coast Guard headquarters had issued both an instruction to all districts (ALDIST 174/97) and a policy letter directing Coast Guard personnel to conduct alcohol testing whenever it might otherwise not be done.⁵ Thus, according to Coast Guard policy, the investigator should have pressed for more timely alcohol testing or conducted the tests himself. Consequently, the Safety Board believes that the Coast Guard should retrain its investigating officers in the policy set forth in ALDIST 174/97 regarding postaccident alcohol testing by Coast Guard personnel.

Because of the newness of the postaccident alcohol-testing regulations, little information is available on the extent to which they are, or are not, being followed. An assessment of the effectiveness of alcohol testing after serious marine incidents would help verify whether the

² Coast Guard regulations at 46 *Code of Federal Regulations* 4.06 require that alcohol tests be conducted within 2 hours of a serious marine incident. Alcohol testing is not required more than 8 hours after a serious marine incident.

³ Anchoring operations, which required moving both anchors several times, were completed at 1448. Crewmembers monitored the vessel at anchorage until 1735.

⁴ *Postaccident Testing for Alcohol and Other Drugs in the Marine Industry and the Ramming of the Portland-South Portland (Million Dollar) Bridge at Portland, Maine, by the Liberian Tankship Julie N on September 27, 1996*, Special Investigation Report NTSB/SIR-98-02 (Washington, DC: NTSB, 1998).

⁵ Although the instructions specify breath testing, the new Coast Guard regulations authorize saliva as an acceptable specimen for alcohol testing.

alcohol-testing regulations are effective and whether they are being followed, and would provide the basis for taking corrective action if necessary. The Safety Board therefore believes that the Coast Guard should verify whether the regulations for alcohol testing after serious marine incidents are being followed, and if not, identify corrective measures.

As a result of its investigation of the *Kition* accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the U.S. Coast Guard take the following action:

Retrain your investigating officers in the policy set forth in ALDIST 174/97 regarding postaccident alcohol testing by Coast Guard personnel. (M-08-8)

Verify whether the regulations for alcohol testing after serious marine incidents are being followed, and if not, identify corrective measures. (M-08-9)

The Safety Board has also issued a recommendation to the Board of New Orleans–Baton Rouge Steamship Pilot Examiners for the Mississippi River. The Board would appreciate a response from you within 90 days, addressing actions you have taken or intend to take to implement its recommendations. In your response, please refer to Safety Recommendations M-08-8 and -9. 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 these recommendations.

[Original Signed]

By: Mark V. Rosenker
Acting Chairman