

LOG 405A



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

Date: DEC 22 1995

In Reply Refer to: M-95-59

Honorable Roy L. Schneider  
Governor  
Virgin Islands of the United States  
21-22 Kongens Gade  
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00802

On October 8, 1994, the Liberian tankship SEAL ISLAND was moored at the Hess Oil Refinery in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. About 0845, while engineering personnel were changing the lubricating oil strainer on the ship's service turbogenerator, lubricating oil sprayed onto the hot turbine casing and a fire erupted.

The fire resulted in the death of three crewmembers and serious injury of six other crewmembers. The fire seriously damaged the tankship's engineroom; heat, smoke, water, and soot badly damaged the accommodations and pilothouse. The tankship was declared "no longer a useful carrier" and its owner, the Seal Island Shipping Corporation, had it towed to Spain where it was sold as scrap for \$12 million.<sup>1</sup>

During its investigation of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board identified a number of problems in the area of survival factors, including an inadequate Hess Oil Vessel Islands Corporation (HOVIC) emergency plan at the refinery, which resulted in a partial lack of effectiveness in the response effort by the HOVIC fire brigade. The refinery responders lacked the knowledge, experience, and specialized equipment necessary to effectively fight a shipboard fire.

Because the SEAL ISLAND fire was contained to the tankship, the HOVIC fire brigade had limited need for outside response resources, only an additional ambulance and medical personnel from the St. Croix Hospital. However, this accident again highlights the fact that the U.S. Virgin Islands lacks a comprehensive contingency plan for responding to vessel fires that are beyond the capabilities of local firefighters. The Safety Board continues to be concerned that no such contingency plan exists. Numerous vessels carrying passengers and cargo routinely enter the U. S. Virgin Islands, and one of the world's largest oil refineries with berths for as many as ten ships is located in St. Croix.

<sup>1</sup> For further information, read Marine Accident Report *Engineroom Fire On Board the Liberian Tankship SEAL ISLAND while moored at the Amerada Hess Oil Terminal in Ct. Croix, U. S. Virgin Islands, October 8, 1994 (NTSB-MAR-95/04)*.

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According to May 8, 1995, letter from the Commandant of the Coast Guard, guidance for developing firefighting contingency plans will be provided to the Captains of the Port (COTPs). The Coast Guard is attempting to provide contingency plans at each port and harbors to protect against the dangers of marine fires. However, the Government of the Virgin Islands has not indicated to the Safety Board that it is working in cooperation with the Coast Guard and other agencies to help complete a firefighting plan for the Virgin Islands.

The National Transportation Safety Board therefore recommends that the U. S. Virgin Islands:

Cooperate with the U. S. Coast Guard in developing a fire contingency plan that ensures a rapid response with adequate firefighting resources to a major shipboard fire in any port or terminal within the U. S. Virgin Islands. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-95-59)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations M-95-54 through -58 to the U. S. Coast Guard, M-95-60 through -62 to the Hess Oil Virgin Islands Corporation, and M-95-63 to the National Petroleum Refineries Association.

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 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 Recommendation M-95-59.

Chairman HALL, VICE Chairman FRANCIS, Member HAMMERSCHMIDT, and Member GOGLIA concurred in this recommendation.

By:

  
Jim Hall  
Chairman