



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: December 21, 1992

In Reply Refer To: M-92-62 and -63

Mr. Robert F. Dann
 President
 Robert Dann Company
 Post Office Box 250
 Chesapeake City., Maryland 21915

About 0205¹ on April 21, 1991, in the Chesapeake Bay, off Cove Point, Maryland, the U.S. Naval Academy sailing vessel AMERICAN PROMISE and Barge E-2, which was being pushed ahead of the tug SUN COAST, collided. The sailing vessel had 12 crewmembers on board, the tug had 5 crewmembers, and the barge was unmanned. No serious injuries resulted from this accident. The sailing vessel sank, but was salvaged. The AMERICAN PROMISE sustained more than \$800,000 damage and the Barge E-2 sustained about \$10,000 damage. The SUN COAST was not damaged.²

As a result of its investigation of this accident, the Safety Board identified several safety issues, including the adequacy of the crews' collision avoidance actions, adequacy of look-outs aboard the SUN COAST, adequacy of radiotelephone communications procedures by the crew of the AMERICAN PROMISE, and effectiveness of the sailing vessel's radar reflector.

The Safety Board found that under the prevailing weather conditions on the night of the accident, the SUN COAST's relief master could not effectively maintain a continuous visual look-out while performing navigational duties. He testified that prior to the accident, the seas were "3 to 5 feet, breaking over the bow of the barge, mostly a swell rather than a chop." A "squall would come and go." The wind speed was 17 to 20 knots from NNE, with "pretty good gusts." He stated that the tug's radarscope was picking up sea return and rain clutter and that some of the images that he was picking up were poor.

¹All times are local based on a 24hour clock.

²For more detailed information read Marine Accident/Incident Summary Report--Collision of the U.S. Sailing Vessel AMERICAN PROMISE and the U.S. Freight Barge E-2 being pushed ahead of the U.S. Tug SUN COAST Off Cove Point, Chesapeake Bay, April 21, 1991 (NTSB/MAR-92/01/SUM).

The Safety Board determined from postaccident interviews that visibility through the tug's pilothouse windows, which were not equipped with windshield wipers, was significantly diminished. The relief master stated that he saw the light on the sailing vessel's mast only seconds before the collision. However, the watchstanders aboard the AMERICAN PROMISE testified that they saw the navigation lights of the tow when the SUN COAST was about a mile away. In the night and driving rain, windshield wipers to keep the tug's windows clean would have aided the operator's ability to see the navigation lights of the AMERICAN PROMISE sooner.

The Safety Board concludes that the lack of windshield wipers on the pilothouse windows contributed to the relief master's failure to see the navigation lights of the AMERICAN PROMISE until the collision was unavoidable.

The SUN COAST deckhand on watch described his pilothouse duties as bringing coffee to the relief master, keeping him awake, turning on the heaters, and keeping the windows clean. He also stated that he checked the engines hourly. He stated that he did not know what was meant by "look-out." The relief master testified that he had not given look-out instructions to the deckhand.

Because the relief master could not maintain a continuous look-out, as a safety practice, he should have instructed the deckhand on watch regarding proper look-out procedures and had him serve as look-out. With the pilothouse of the tug located more than 350 feet behind the barge's bow, and the tow proceeding in squally weather with the pilothouse windows closed, maintaining a good visual look-out was paramount. If necessary, the operator should have posted a look-out outside the pilothouse or had him go forward on the barge to verify the radar contact.

The crewmembers on watch on the AMERICAN PROMISE sighted the SUN COAST tow as early as 0145, about 20 minutes before the collision. Had the SUN COAST deckhand been trained and assigned as look-out, he might have been able to sight the sailing vessel before he left the pilothouse at 0200 to inspect the engineroom.

The Safety Board concludes that had the deckhand on the SUN COAST been trained and assigned as a look-out, the AMERICAN PROMISE might have been sighted earlier and the collision might have been avoided.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Robert Dann Company:

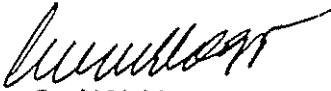
Institute a training program for crewmembers aboard your vessels that instructs them in the duties, techniques, and responsibilities of a look-out and require that operators in charge of the navigation watch on your vessels assign a crewmember as a look-out. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-92-62)

Install windshield wipers or other suitable means of keeping pilothouse windows clear of precipitation non the SUN COAST ad other company-owned tugs to improve the visibility for vessel operators and look-outs. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-92-63)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendation M-92-58 to the Secretary of the Navy; M-92-59 through -61 to the U.S. Naval Academy; and M-92-64 to the American Waterway Operators.

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 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 recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations M-92-62 and -63.

VOGT, Chairman, COUGHLIN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, HART, and HAMMERSCHMIDT, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: Carl W. Vogt
Chairman