

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: October 21, 1980

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Forwarded to:  
Mr. Anthony L. Kucera  
President  
The American Waterways Operators, Inc.  
1600 Wilson Boulevard  
Suite 1101  
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-80-100 and -101

About 2058 c.s.t. on December 19, 1979, the tankship M/V PINA and the towboat M/V MR. PETE with its tow collided at about mile 99.3 in the Mississippi River, at New Orleans, Louisiana. On impact, slop oil from the No. 1 port wing tank of the PINA spilled into the river, ignited, and set fire to the port side of the PINA. Burning oil spilled on the MR. PETE's lead barge and contaminated some cargo. The PINA was maneuvered to the west bank of the river, where it collided with the barge ACO 121B. Burning oil also spilled on this barge and contaminated some of its cargo. The total damage, including oilspill cleanup, was estimated at \$3,265,000. 1/

The PINA and the MR. PETE were approaching from opposite directions so a meeting situation was developing. The Inland Rules are quite explicit in detailing the proper course of action to be taken by vessels in meeting situations. They call for either vessel to initiate a one-blast whistle signal, which is to be answered by a corresponding one-blast signal from the other vessel, and for the vessels to pass on the port side of each other. The only provision whereby a starboard-to-starboard passing is allowed to vessels approaching from opposite directions is when the vessels' courses are so far to starboard of each other as not to be considered as meeting head and head. This was clearly not the case in this accident because the vessels were positioned to the port side of each other from the time of first sighting to the time that they collided port bow to port bow. The operator of the MR. PETE had a faulty, or at least an incomplete, knowledge of the rules. His attempt to execute a starboard-to-starboard passing with the upbound PINA was completely contrary to the rules. The Safety Board believes that a properly licensed towboat operator, who had been tested in his knowledge of the rules at the time of licensing, would have had a better understanding of the requirements of the rules and may not have attempted a starboard-to-starboard passing. The Safety Board concludes that this collision probably would not have occurred if the movements of the MR. PETE had been controlled by a licensed towboat operator.

1/ For more detailed information read "Marine Accident Report--Collision of Liberian Tankship M/V PINA and the Towboat MR. PETE and Its Tow, Mile 99.3, Lower Mississippi River, December 19, 1979" (NTSB-MAR-80-17).

Lights similar to the navigation lights that were displayed on the lead barge of the MR. PETE's tow were tested and found to be grossly deficient in intensity. Because of this deficiency, the pilot of the PINA never sighted the barges in tow of the MR. PETE until seconds before impact. The pilot stated that if he had known that the MR. PETE was pushing two barges, he still would have navigated his vessel in the same way that he did on the night of the accident. Despite this statement, the Safety Board believes that the timeliness of his actions were affected by his erroneous assumption of the maneuverability of the approaching towboat. If he had known that this towboat was pushing two barges, he would have known that it would not be as maneuverable as he expected, and he might have initiated some additional action earlier to avoid collision.

There are at least four manufacturers of battery-operated navigation lights acceptable to the Coast Guard as meeting the requirements of the Rules of the Road. Since such lights are commercially available, there is no justification for the use of improper homemade lights such as those that were used on the lead barge of the MR. PETE's tow. The use of inadequate lights indicates a laxity in Coast Guard enforcement of the rules, and a lack of knowledge of the availability of acceptable manufactured lights, a willful disregard for proper navigation lights, or an unwillingness to purchase such lights by the marine industry in New Orleans.

The Coast Guard recognizes its responsibility to board uninspected commercial vessels for law enforcement purposes. In some areas, such as the Second Coast Guard District, towboat boarding programs seem to be having positive results. In New Orleans, on the other hand, the boarding program seems to neglect tows operating on the Mississippi River. The Safety Board believes that because of the high density of traffic and the large volume of dangerous cargo carried on the river, the present boarding program in New Orleans should be expanded and intensified to insure that uninspected commercial vessels are being operated safely on the Mississippi River. If more towboat boardings had been conducted on the Mississippi River, the operator of the MR. PETE might not have been hired to operate towboats in and around the Port of New Orleans without a license. The Safety Board believes that the safety of navigation in busy ports such as New Orleans requires that towboat operators be properly licensed as set forth in 46 U.S.C. 405(b). The effectiveness of such laws is dependent upon their enforcement, which needs to be improved in the New Orleans area. Additionally, the Safety Board believes that the Coast Guard should conduct boardings of tows underway to determine that adequate barge navigation lights are used. In view of the reported widespread use of improper lights, regular boardings would spur towboat and barge owners and operators to insure that proper navigation lights are used.

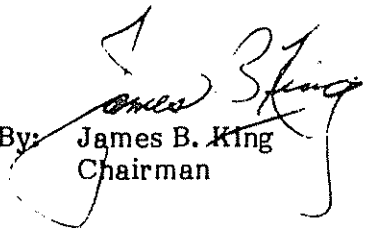
Responsibility for compliance with the requirements for licensed operators and proper navigation lights ultimately rests with the barge and towboat industry. There would be no enforcement problem if towboat operators hired only properly licensed personnel to operate their towboats and if barge owners insured that available, acceptable navigation lights were used on their barges. The Safety Board believes that inland marine companies should carry out their responsibility in these areas, thereby increasing the safety of life and property on the busy inland waterways of the United States.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that The American Waterways Operators, Inc.:

Notify member companies of the need for each company to establish procedures whereby it can insure that only properly licensed personnel are employed to operate towboats on the inland waterways and western rivers of the United States. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-100)

Notify member companies of the availability of manufactured portable barge navigation lights acceptable to the U.S. Coast Guard as meeting the requirements of the Rules of the Road and of the need to use only such portable lights on their barges. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-101)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS and GOLDMAN, Members, concurred in these recommendations. BURSLEY, Member, did not participate.

  
By: James B. King  
Chairman