

11-173

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: October 14, 1981

Forwarded to:

Admiral John B. Hayes
Commandant
U.S. Coast Guard
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-81-84 and -85

From 1970 through 1979, there were 34,022 commercial vessel accidents in U.S. navigable waters. The average number of accidents increased 7 percent annually during the period, from 2,582 accidents in 1970 to 4,665 accidents in 1979. About 40 percent of the accidents in U.S. waters are collision accidents. The number of collisions increased from 1,093 in 1970 to 1,621 in 1979. Based on the mean yearly percentage change, collisions increased 5 percent per year over the 10-year period.

The Safety Board believes that the installation of ship data recorders would significantly improve the reconstruction of events leading to ship collisions and the determination of probable cause of these accidents. The problems of onboard ship data collection for accident investigation purposes were discussed in the Safety Board investigations of the collision of the SS AFRICAN NEPTUNE with the Sidney Lanier Bridge in Brunswick, Georgia, on November 7, 1972, and again following the collision of the SEA WITCH and the ESSO BRUSSELS in the New York Harbor, on June 2, 1973. In each case, the Safety Board recommended a requirement for recording devices such as the flight data recorder ("black box") used in aviation. The need to require the installation of ship data recorders was reiterated in the Safety Board's report of the SS MARINE FLORIDIAN collision with the Benjamin Harrison Memorial Bridge at Hopewell, Virginia, on February 27, 1977, and again in the collision of the USCG Cutter BLACKTHORN with the SS CAPRICORN in Tampa Bay on January 28, 1980. In response to the Safety Board's two recommendations to require ship data recorders, the U.S. Coast Guard has initiated a study to determine the population of applicable vessels and the degree of technical sophistication needed in data recorders. The Safety Board continues to believe that a requirement for automatic data recorders in specific ship types will vastly improve measures for preventing the recurring causes of ship collisions and that the above Coast Guard study should be expedited.

In recent years, the U.S. Maritime Administration, the Coast Guard, and maritime organizations abroad have been expanding shiphandling simulator research and training programs. The results of the programs have been encouraging in terms of the training potential for deck officers and pilots. However, the Safety Board believes that shiphandling simulators should be used in conjunction with at-sea experience to help to identify the general shiphandling procedures to be followed when ships experience vital control system failures.

3257A

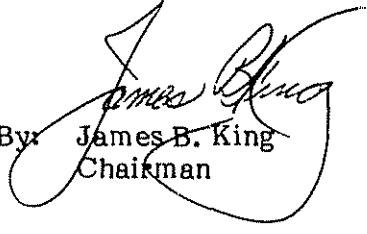
MSS-81-A

In the interest of improving maritime safety and reducing the number of collision accidents, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the U.S. Coast Guard:

Expedite the study to require the installation of automatic recording devices to preserve vital navigational information aboard applicable ships. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-81-84)

In cooperation with the U.S. Maritime Administration, identify and emphasize in licensing and certification programs the general emergency shiphandling procedures expected to be followed by vessel operators when ships experience vital control system failures. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-81-85)

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


By: James B. King
Chairman