

LOG M-382C



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: December 21, 1992

In Reply Refer To: M-92-64

Mr. Joseph Farrell
President
American Waterway Operators
1600 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1000
Arlington, Virginia 22209

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).

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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.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the American Waterway Operators:

Publicize this accident to your members and emphasize the need to have windshield wipers or other suitable means of keeping pilothouse windows clear of precipitation to improve visibility for vessel operators and look-outs. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-92-64)

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-92-62 and -63 to the Robert Dann Company.

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 recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation M-92-64.

VOGT, Chairman, COUGHLIN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, HART, and HAMMERSCHMIDT, Members, concurred in this recommendation.


By: Carl W. Vogt
Chairman