



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: July 3, 2002

In reply refer to: M-02-15

Mr. Arthur Imperatore, Jr.
President
NY Waterway
Foot of Pershing Road
Weehawken, New Jersey 07086

The National Transportation Safety Board (Safety Board) is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating transportation accidents, determining their probable cause, and making recommendations to prevent similar accidents from occurring. We are providing the following information to urge you to take action on the safety recommendation in this letter. The Safety Board is vitally interested in this recommendation because it is designed to prevent accidents and save lives.

The recommendation addresses the adequacy of vessel maintenance. The recommendation is derived from the Safety Board's investigation of the fire on board the small passenger vessel *Port Imperial Manhattan* in the Hudson River, New York City, New York, on November 17, 2000, and is consistent with the evidence we found and the analysis we performed.¹ As a result of this investigation, the Safety Board has issued safety recommendations to the U.S. Coast Guard, the Federal Communications Commission, the Passenger Vessel Association, and NY Waterway. The Safety Board would appreciate a response from you within 90 days addressing actions you have taken or intend to take to implement our recommendation.

Based on its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the fire on board the *Port Imperial Manhattan* was NY Waterway's inadequate inspection and maintenance of the vessel's electrical system. Contributing to the extent of the damage were the lack of a fixed fire detection and suppression system and the crewmembers' lack of knowledge of proper marine firefighting techniques.

From interviews with company officials and reviews of company documents, Safety Board investigators determined that NY Waterway did not have a preventive

¹ For further information, read: National Transportation Safety Board, *Fire on board the Small Passenger Vessel Port Imperial Manhattan, Hudson River, New York City, New York, November 17, 2000*, Marine Accident Report NTSB/MAR-02/02 (Washington, DC: NTSB, 2002).

maintenance program for the hulls, the mechanical systems, and the electrical systems of the vessels in its fleet. Documentation provided by the company indicated that engineroom inspections had been made but lacked details indicating the scope of the maintenance performed and the intervals between the maintenance. Company officials stated that a circuit check had been conducted on the 12-volt electrical system but could not say when the check had been performed. Preventive maintenance of the electrical system would have included testing the circuits, checking the junction box, and tightening the wire connecting bolts, which loosened over time and caused the fire.

After the fire, NY Waterway introduced additional checksheets to improve the monthly maintenance of its vessels. However, the use of checksheets is not equivalent to the implementation of a comprehensive preventive maintenance program, which is much broader in scope. A preventive maintenance program for a fleet of vessels should include, as a minimum, established procedures for reporting maintenance and repair needs, for ensuring good interaction between vessel-operating personnel and shoreside maintenance staff, for conducting vessel inspections and repairs, for verifying and/or testing repairs, for retaining and reviewing maintenance and repair records, and for overseeing the maintenance and repair process. Shipboard mechanical systems consist of numerous moving parts that require planned inspections and maintenance to avoid unexpected breakdowns and unsafe conditions for passengers and crew. The preventive maintenance program developed by a company needs to address all systems affecting the safety of passenger vessels.

The National Transportation Safety Board, therefore, makes the following safety recommendation to NY Waterway:

For the vessels in your fleet, develop and implement a preventive maintenance program for systems affecting safe operation, including the hull and the mechanical and electrical systems. (M-02-15)

In your response to the recommendation in this letter, please refer to M-02-15. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6177.

Chairman BLAKEY, Vice Chairman CARMODY and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in this recommendation.

Original Signed

By: Marion C. Blakey
Chairman