

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 22, 1978

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

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)
M-78-63 through -68

On January 10, 1977, the coastal tankship M/V CHESTER A. POLING broke in two about 6 nmi ESE of Cape Ann, Massachusetts. The POLING was en route from Everett, Massachusetts, to Newington, New Hampshire, during a severe winter storm in a partially ballasted condition. The Coast Guard responded promptly to the POLING's distress message, and six of the seven persons aboard were rescued. One person, who fell into the ocean while attempting to enter the Coast Guard helicopter's rescue basket, is missing and presumed dead. 1/

The applicable Coast Guard regulations did not require that a loading manual be prepared for the POLING. The master had no information regarding the relative magnitude of hull stresses caused by various loading arrangements, sea states, ship speeds, and relative headings. He relied on his experience to determine the amount and location of ballast necessary and to select an appropriate heading and speed. In its analysis of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board determined that the distribution of ballast water in the POLING was improper.

When the POLING broke in two, the master and seaman in the wheel-house on the forward part of the vessel were isolated from the primary lifesaving equipment, which was stowed near the vessel's stern. When the bow began to sink, these men were forced to enter the 30° F ocean water with only personal flotation devices to sustain them. Fortunately, they were rescued within 20 minutes by the Coast Guard cutter CAPE GEORGE.

1/ For more detailed information read "Marine Accident Report--M/V CHESTER A. POLING Sinking near Cape Ann, Massachusetts, January 10, 1977," (NTSB-MAR-78-7).

A Coast Guard helicopter made several attempts to rescue the crewmembers on the POLING's stern with a rescue basket. The first time the basket was lowered, it landed on some empty oil drums. The cook entered the basket and was successfully hoisted to the helicopter. However, on the next attempt the basket was held outboard at the ship's rail by one crewmember. As a seaman leaned outside the rail to grab the basket, he fell into the ocean and was lost. A guide line had been properly attached to the basket by the helicopter's crew, but the POLING's crew did not use it effectively to guide the basket to a safe location on the POLING's deck.

Even though the Coast Guard responded promptly, five of the six persons rescued were forced to enter the cold water. Although they were in the water only a short time, each person suffered from hypothermia. If the Coast Guard had not been able to respond as quickly as it did, more persons would have died.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the U.S. Coast Guard:

Require that a loading manual indicating proper cargo and ballast loading arrangements and procedures be prepared for each coastal tankship. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-78-63)

Study the feasibility of providing estimated hull stress information based on loading condition, sea state, and ship speed and relative heading in graphical form in coastal tankship loading manuals. (Class III, Longer Term Action) (M-78-64)


Require that exposure suits be provided for each crewmember on vessels that routinely operate in areas of cold air or sea temperatures. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-78-65)

Require that at least one inflatable liferaft be stowed near each accommodation and working space on coastal tankships. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-78-66)

Develop an effective method to insure that each merchant seaman is instructed and trained in the proper use of helicopter-borne rescue baskets. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-78-67)

Install a placard of simple user instructions suitable for emergency situations on each Coast Guard helicopter-borne rescue basket. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-78-68)

KING, Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and DRIVER, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.

By  James B. King
Chairman

