

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 28, 1978

Forwarded to:
Mr. James H. Gibbens
Vice President
Texaco, Inc.
P.O. Box 60252
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-78-73

On February 4, 1978, the industrial vessel HALLIBURTON 207 exploded while attempting to plug an offshore oil well that had been drilled by the Texaco, Inc. barge GARDNER in the Garden Island Bay section of the Mississippi River Delta. The explosion raised the forward section of the vessel's main deck approximately 4 feet, distorted internal bulkheads and strength members, and breached the hull. The vessel flooded slowly and sank. The explosion killed one person and injured two others. 1/

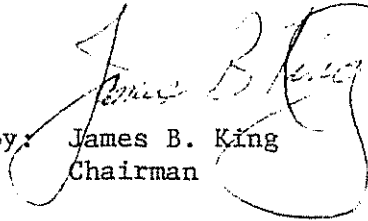
The accident occurred when natural gas from the oil well entered the HALLIBURTON 207's interior as a result of a piping failure, and was ignited by the arcing contacts of an electric motor controller. Petroleum drilling operations are always considered to be hazardous. However, the repeated failures to rectify the loss of drilling fluid circulation and to control the gas pressure indicate that the well was in critical condition. Continued collapse of the strata surrounding the well could have caused the gas to vent uncontrollably to the surface, creating a "blowout." In addition, any interruption of the plugging operation could have allowed gas from the well to flow back through the drill string and enter the HALLIBURTON 207's discharge piping. Because of their considerable experience, the Texaco drilling and production superintendent and his assistant should have been aware of the hazard involved with servicing this well.

1/ For more detailed information, read "Marine Accident Report: M/V HALLIBURTON 207 Explosion and Sinking, Garden Island Bay, Mississippi River Delta, February 4, 1978," (NTSB-MAR-78-8). Copies of the report will be available after October 15, 1978.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that Texaco, Inc.:

Establish instructions requiring Texaco, Inc., employees who supervise petroleum well drilling or production operations to formulate contingency plans with the person in charge of personnel who are contracted to service the well, before commencing service operations. Such plans should include, but not be limited to, the manning of key valves. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-78-73)

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


By: James B. King
Chairman