



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: September 27, 2000

In reply refer to: M-00-25

Honorable Debra Powell
Mayor
City of East St. Louis
301 River Park Drive
East St. Louis, Illinois 62201

The National Transportation 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 your organization 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.

This recommendation addresses the effectiveness of safety measures provided for the permanently moored vessel (PMV) *President Casino on the Admiral (Admiral)* and the adequacy of public safety for PMVs. The recommendation is derived from the Safety Board's investigation of the April 4, 1998, marine accident concerning the ramming of the Eads Bridge by barges in tow of the M/V *Anne Holly* with subsequent ramming and near breakaway of the *Admiral* in St. Louis Harbor, Missouri,¹ and is consistent with the evidence we found and the analysis we performed. As a result of this investigation, the Safety Board has issued 30 safety recommendations, 1 of which is addressed to the city of East St. Louis. Information supporting this recommendation is discussed below. The Safety Board would appreciate a response from you within 90 days addressing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement our recommendation.

About 1950 on April 4, 1998, a tow of the M/V *Anne Holly*, comprising 12 loaded and 2 empty barges, which was traveling northbound on the Mississippi River through the St. Louis Harbor, struck the Missouri-side pier of the center span of the Eads Bridge. Eight barges broke away from the tow and drifted back through the Missouri span. Three of these barges drifted toward the *Admiral*, a permanently moored gaming vessel below the bridge on the Missouri side of the river. The drifting barges struck the moored *Admiral*, causing 8 of its 10 mooring lines to break. The *Admiral* then rotated clockwise downriver, away from the Missouri riverbank. The

¹ For additional information, see forthcoming Marine Accident Report NTSB/MAR-00/01: *Ramming of the Eads Bridge by Barges in Tow of the M/V Anne Holly with Subsequent Ramming and Near Breakaway of the President Casino on the Admiral, St. Louis Harbor, Missouri, April 4, 1998*, (Washington, DC: National Transportation Safety Board, 2000).

captain of the *Anne Holly* disengaged his vessel from the six remaining barges in the tow and placed the *Anne Holly*'s bow against the *Admiral*'s bow to hold it against the bank. About the time the *Anne Holly* began pushing against the *Admiral*, the *Admiral*'s next-to-last mooring line parted. The *Anne Holly* and the single mooring wire that remained attached to the *Admiral*'s stern anchor held the *Admiral* near the Missouri bank. No deaths resulted from the accident; 50 people were examined for minor injuries. Of those examined, 16 were sent to local hospitals for further treatment. Damages were estimated at \$11 million.

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the ramming of the Eads Bridge in St. Louis Harbor by barges in tow of the *Anne Holly* and the subsequent breakup of the tow was the poor decision-making of the captain of the *Anne Holly* in attempting to transit St. Louis Harbor with a large tow, in darkness, under high current and flood conditions, and the failure of the management of American Milling, L.P., to provide adequate policy and direction to ensure the safe operation of its towboats.

The National Transportation Safety Board also determined that the probable cause of the near breakaway of the *President Casino* on the *Admiral* was the failure of the owner, the local and State authorities, and the U.S. Coast Guard to adequately protect the permanently moored vessel from waterborne and current-related risks.

The Coast Guard coordinated the development of the St. Louis Harbor Emergency Response Plan in cooperation with State and local fire and rescue services and the local marine industry. The intent of the plan was to allow the emergency response agencies, the industry, and the Coast Guard to achieve coordinated and effective use of public and private response resources during an emergency. Although the Coast Guard has Federal responsibility for the overall safety of the port during an emergency, the responsibility for emergency response rests with local fire and rescue services and State response services. While, as a policy matter, the Coast Guard responds to emergencies to the extent that its resources allow, it does not have primary search and rescue responsibility in inland areas, such as St. Louis Harbor. The Coast Guard does not have firefighting or search and rescue capabilities in St. Louis Harbor, yet its personnel helped coordinate the plan, participated in drills, and provided information about marine risk mitigation measures to the incident commander. The Coast Guard Captain of the Port also assisted in crises by restricting vessel movements on the Mississippi River.

The Safety Board evaluated the St. Louis Harbor Emergency Response Plan and found that it adequately identified the agencies that would participate in marine emergency responses in St. Louis Harbor and provided a comprehensive contact listing for critical responders. The plan further identified the interagency command and control responsibilities of the various agencies and designated the radio frequencies to be used during responses.

The response plan, however, did not take into account the various types of accidents that might occur in the harbor. For instance, the plan did not anticipate an accident similar to that involving the *Admiral* on April 4, 1998—the breakaway or near breakaway of a high-capacity PMV. The possibility of such an accident, especially during a period of high water, was reasonably foreseeable. The St. Louis Harbor Emergency Response Plan did not identify all foreseeable emergencies or create strategies to deal with them. Without identifying the types and

magnitudes of the possible emergencies for which St. Louis Harbor authorities would have to be prepared, response planners could not determine the amounts, types, and sources of emergency equipment and other resources that would be needed to conduct a successful response.

A 1994 search and rescue exercise sponsored by the Coast Guard in New Orleans, Louisiana, revealed that local contingency plans and responses for the New Orleans area were inadequate for rescuing large numbers of people from the Mississippi River. The exercise illustrated that responding to emergencies requiring the rescue of large numbers of people from the Mississippi River can overwhelm local resources, even in municipalities that may have greater marine resources than St. Louis.

It is conceivable that, had the *Anne Holly* not held the *Admiral* against the riverbank on April 4, 1998, the *Admiral* might have broken free of its last mooring wire and floated downriver, possibly causing collisions and sinking or capsizing under one of the lower bridges. The risk to the *Admiral* and its more than 2,000 occupants would have been high in such a scenario because the *Admiral* did not have means of propulsion or navigational control, marine lifesaving equipment (such as life floats or personal flotation devices), or an experienced marine crew.

Therefore, the Safety Board concluded that the St. Louis Harbor Emergency Response Plan did not sufficiently prepare emergency response agencies to deal with an emergency involving the rescue of a large number of people on or in the Mississippi River.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board makes the following safety recommendation to the city of East St. Louis:

Conduct, in cooperation with U.S. Coast Guard, the States of Missouri and Illinois, and the city of St. Louis, regular drills to exercise the contingency plans for a variety of different marine scenarios, such as stopping breakaway vessels or rescuing large numbers of people from the Mississippi River. (M-00-25)

The Safety Board also issued safety recommendations to the U.S. Coast Guard, the Research and Special Programs Administration, the States of Missouri and Illinois, the city of St. Louis, the National League of Cities, the American Association of Port Authorities, the American Gas Association, the American Public Gas Association, President Casinos, Inc., Laclede Gas Company, and American Milling, L.P. In your response to the recommendation in this letter, please refer to Safety Recommendation M-00-25. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6170.

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

By: Jim Hall
Chairman