

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: December 30, 1976

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Forwarded to:

Honorable Robert J. Blackwell  
Assistant Secretary for Maritime Affairs  
Department of Commerce  
Washington, D.C. 20230

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-76-26 and 27

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On 24 September 1974, the SS TRANSHURON was underway in the Arabian Sea when the main propulsion switchboard caught fire and the main control circuits were destroyed. The vessel was left without means of propulsion. After drifting for about 63 hours, the vessel grounded on Kiltan Island on 26 September 1974. The grounding breached the vessel's hull, caused a pollution incident, and resulted in the loss of the vessel.<sup>1/</sup>

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the accident was the loss of power by the SS TRANSHURON which resulted in the grounding of the vessel on Kiltan Island reef.

Contributing to the accident were the rendering inoperative of the vessel's propulsion switchboard by a fire, caused by the failure of the iron pipe nipple in the bronze condenser head, the reluctance of the master of the SS TRANSHURON to accept offers of aid from other vessels, and his failure to use available information in order to anchor prior to the grounding of the vessel on Kiltan Island.

During the period the TRANSHURON was adrift and seeking assistance from their home office, all messages from the vessel with URGENT priority were reduced to no priority and forwarded as routine messages. This delayed response affected decisions to secure effective aid and contributed to the eventual grounding of the vessel. Since the grounding of the vessel, the MARISAT satellite communications system has become operative. This system, with its wide-range voice communications, could have assisted greatly in saving the vessel. The Maritime Administration is in a unique position to foster use of modern systems such as this one.

<sup>1/</sup> For more detailed information on this accident, read "Marine Casualty Report, SS TRANSHURON Fire on 24 September 1974 and Grounding on 26 September 1974, Arabian Sea," USCG/NTSB-MAR-76-2.

MAR 8-62

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On the day before the grounding, the master refused offers of assistance and did not ask for immediate assistance from vessels in the area until the probability of grounding was established by visual bearings. The Safety Board could find no justification for allowing this prolonged drifting.

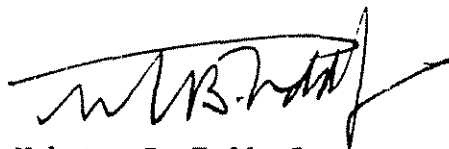
Examination of salvage law and custom revealed no basis for such a long delay. The peril of the vessel was established with the loss of propulsion. Waiting until an extremis situation developed was not in the best interest of the vessel, its crew, or its cargo. The Safety Board considers that an effort has to be made to reaffirm the master's responsibility to summon aid and that owners or their representatives must allow the master to determine when aid should be summoned. With this determination, the master must be free to call for help.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Maritime Administration, Department of Commerce:

Urge shipowners to install communications equipment to use MARISAT communications satellites. (Class II -- Priority Followup) (M-76-26)

Issue an advisory to restate the master's responsibility to call for assistance based upon the immediate casualty situation and to urge owners and operators to develop procedures and information guides to assist masters and inform management personnel of potential communications and logistics problems. (Class II -- Priority Followup) (M-76-27)

TODD, Chairman, BAILEY, Vice Chairman, McADAMS and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendations. HOGUE, Member, did not participate.



By: Webster B. Todd, Jr.  
Chairman

THIS RECOMMENDATION WILL BE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC ON THE ISSUE DATE SHOWN ABOVE. NO PUBLIC DISSEMINATION OF THIS DOCUMENT SHOULD BE MADE PRIOR TO THAT DATE.