



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: May 20, 1991

In Reply Refer To: M-91-12

Honorable Samuel K. Skinner
Secretary
U. S. Department of Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20590

On Sunday, July 30, 1989, the liftboat M/V AVCO V was in the raised position in about 60 feet of water at Ship Shoal, Block 154, in the Gulf of Mexico with 3 crewmembers and 11 offshore workers aboard. Because of deteriorating weather and sea conditions caused by the development of hurricane Chantal in the gulf, the Chevron dispatcher at Leeville, Louisiana, recommended that the master bring the AVCO V into Leeville. About 0100 on Monday, July 31, the master had all persons on board assemble on deck wearing their life preservers while he lowered the liftboat. About 0230 the master headed the AVCO V northward toward the west end of Ship Shoal, intending to proceed around the west end and then eastward along the north side of the shoal to Leeville. While en route, except for the master and a deckhand, most on board slept.

While proceeding northward, the wind and the seas coming toward the vessel's starboard quarter increased in velocity and height, respectively. The vessel began taking water on deck in sufficient quantity to cause equipment stowed on the main deck to shift. About 0505 the AVCO V listed, capsized to port, and sank near the west end of Ship Shoal.¹

In December 1989, the National Transportation Safety Board submitted comments in response to the U.S. Coast Guard Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) "Offshore Supply Vessels Including Liftboats" (CGD 82-004 and CGD 86-074), issued on May 9, 1989. Considering that in the AVCO V accident, the persons below decks received no warning, the Safety Board reemphasizes its NPRM comments that liftboats be required to have general alarm and public address systems.

¹For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--"Capsizing and Sinking of the U.S. Liftboat M/V AVCO V, Gulf of Mexico, July 31, 1989" (NTSB/MAR-91/02).

In addition, as a result of the investigation of this accident, as well as the capsizing and sinking of the liftboat TITAN,² the Safety Board has expressed the need to : (1) limit the transporting of offshore workers on liftboats to the minimum number of such workers required to maintain contractor equipment; (2) develop severe weather contingency plans tailored to the operating characteristics and limitations of the individual liftboat for on-board use by the master; (3) provide adequate lashing points for deck cargo and contractor equipment on liftboats; (4) require inspection and structural standards for new and existing liftboats; (5) establish liftboat stability criteria allowing for the adverse effects of raised flooded legs, wave-induced motions, and sea water on deck; (6) publish a standard outline of liftboat operating manual contents to provide guidance and ensure critical information is adequately addressed; (7) equip liftboats with primary lifesaving equipment that protects persons from water immersion; (8) install an adequate number of exterior doors on all accommodation deck levels of liftboats for rapid exit of persons in an emergency; (9) have liftboat masters give safety briefings about emergency actions to all embarked persons before departing on assignment and again to persons boarding later offshore; (10) hold emergency drills regularly on liftboats and record these in the ship's logbook; (11) have the owners of liftboats regularly monitor the activities of vessels to ensure safety procedures are being implemented; and (12) equip liftboats operating offshore with an approved float-free, automatic emergency position indicating radio beacon. The Safety Board strongly encourages early action be taken concerning these recommendations.

Furthermore, the Safety Board notes that when the TITAN report was released on December 3, 1990, the Coast Guard expected to issue the final rule concerning liftboats in early 1991. However, the Safety Board now understands that the final rule may not be released until mid-1991, over 2 years from the date the NPRM was issued. During the period that the NPRM has been processing, 13 fatalities alone have resulted from the TITAN and AVCO V liftboat accidents. The Safety Board is concerned about the time it is taking the Coast Guard to develop the final rule for liftboats and believes that publication should be expedited.

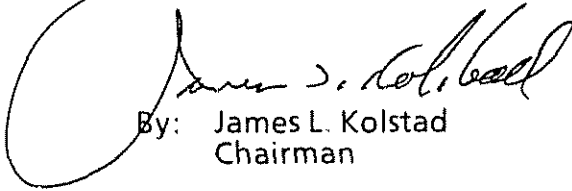
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the U.S. Department of Transportation:

Expedite the publication of the final rule concerned with "Offshore Supply Vessels Including Liftboats " (CGD 82-004 and CGD 86-074) that is being prepared by the United States Coast Guard. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-91-12)

Also, as a result of its investigation, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations M-91-13 and -14 to the U.S. Coast Guard; M-91-15 through -18 to Avis Bourg & Company, Inc.; and M-91-19 through -21 to Chevron, USA. In addition, the Safety Board reiterated Safety Recommendations M-90-87 through -89, -91 through -93, -95, -97, and -98 to the Coast Guard.

²Marine Accident Report--"Capsizing and Sinking of the U.S. Self-propelled Liftboat M/V TITAN, Gulf of Mexico, June 29, 1989" (NTSB/MAR-90/07).

KOLSTAD, Chairman, COUGHLIN, Vice Chairman, and BURNETT, LAUBER, and HART, Members, concurred in this recommendation.



By: James L. Kolstad
Chairman