

Log - M - 369



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: March 14, 1991

In reply refer to: M-91-1 through -3

Captain Vernon Dunlap
Chairman
Rhode Island State Pilotage Commission
22 Hayes Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

At 1639 eastern daylight time on June 23, 1989, the Greek tankship WORLD PRODIGY, en route from Burgas, Bulgaria, to Providence, Rhode Island, carrying more than 195,000 barrels of gas oil (diesel), grounded on Brenton Reef in Rhode Island Sound off the coast of Rhode Island. At the time of the grounding, the vessel was under the navigational control of the master. As a result of the grounding, the hull of the WORLD PRODIGY sustained extensive damage, which allowed about 7,000 barrels of diesel oil to spill into the waters of Rhode Island Sound and Narragansett Bay. Because of the nature of the oil and because of the warm temperatures during the days immediately following the accident, much of the spilled oil quickly evaporated, minimizing the damage done to the nearby coastline. There were no deaths or injuries. Damage to the vessel was estimated at more than 1 million dollars.¹

The Safety Board determined, based on its investigation of this accident, that the Commission was aware that the location of the pilot boarding area changed frequently, that State pilots routinely boarded and disembarked vessels north of Brenton Reef Light, and that the WORLD PRODIGY was never informed of the location of the pilot boarding area before the grounding. The Board is also concerned that efforts were not being made by the Rhode Island State Pilot Commission to ensure that the information in the *U.S. Coast Pilot (Volume 2)* regarding the location of the pilot boarding area and the Rhode Island State's pilot's VHF-FM working frequency was not being updated in a timely manner.

¹For more detailed information, read Marine Accident Report--"Grounding of the Greek Tankship WORLD PRODIGY off the Coast of Rhode Island, June 23, 1989," (NTSB/MAR-91/01).

Long before the WORLD PRODIGY grounded on Brenton Reef, Rhode Island State law (Chapter 46-9) mandated State pilotage for every foreign- and U.S.- flag vessel under register that entered or departed from any port in Rhode Island or traversed the territorial waters of the State north of the line drawn between Point Judith and Sakonnet Point. The responsibility for the interpretation and enforcement of the statute, as well as all other State pilotage rules and regulations, belonged to the Rhode Island State Pilotage Commission.

State Pilots, with the full knowledge of the Commission, customarily boarded inbound vessels north of the territorial line between Point Judith and Sakonnet Point. In some cases, State pilots were boarding inbound vessels north of Brenton Reef Light and disembarking outbound vessels as far north as the No. 11 buoy stationed off Bull Point. Your own testimony indicated that the practice of boarding vessels north of the territorial line was a time-honored custom that had been in effect for more than 30 years.

The master of the WORLD PRODIGY testified that before the accident, he had believed that the pilot boarding area was located in the vicinity of Brenton Reef Light. There is every indication, however, that the master, who had made only one previous trip into Narragansett Bay, had intended to board a State pilot north of Brenton Reef Light. The intended trackline, which was drawn by the master to indicate the route that he intended to follow during his approach to Narragansett Bay, ended at a point 0.8 of a mile north of the tower. In addition, at 1630 when the WORLD PRODIGY was almost abeam of Brenton Reef Light, the master radioed the pilot boat and informed the vessel's operator that his vessel was 2.5 miles away from the pilot boarding area. The Safety Board therefore concludes that the master had intended to board a State pilot north of Brenton Reef Light.

Before the accident, the exact location of the pilot boarding and disembarking area depended, to a great extent, on the weather and sea conditions in the vicinity of Brenton Reef Light and the personal preferences of each State pilot. The operator of the NORTHEAST I stated that because State pilots generally boarded inbound vessels about 1 to 1.5 miles southeast of Brenton Reef Light, it had been his usual practice to pass along the approximate location of the pilot boarding area to inbound vessels. On the day of the accident, however, this information was never communicated by the State pilot, operator, or deckhand to the master of the WORLD PRODIGY.

Chapter 46-9 of the General Laws of the State of Rhode Island clearly states that the Commission has the authority to designate those areas in which vessels shall be boarded or left by State pilots. The Commission's rules and regulations, however, do not require the pilots to notify inbound vessels of the exact location where they will board each vessel, although the pilots customarily do so. The circumstances surrounding the grounding of the WORLD PRODIGY suggest that public safety would be better served if State pilots were required by the Commission to board and disembark all foreign- and U.S.-flag vessels (under register) south of Brenton Reef Light. Had the master of the WORLD PRODIGY been notified that the State pilot intended to board his vessel 1 to 1.5 miles southeast of Brenton Reef Light, this accident would not have occurred. The Safety Board believes that the Commission should take action to ensure that State pilots notify, in a timely manner, all inbound vessels of the exact location where the pilot will board the vessel.

The *U.S. Coast Pilot (Volume 2)*, which many foreign-flag and U.S.-flag deck watch officers regularly consult in order to obtain pilotage information, does not list VHF-FM channel 10 as the Rhode Island State pilot's working frequency. Instead, VHF-FM channel 18A is listed as being the pilot's working frequency. Your testimony indicated that use of VHF-FM channel 18A as the pilot frequency had been discontinued before the accident. You also stated that you were not aware of any attempt before the accident to have the information in the *Coast Pilot* updated.

It is believed that the master of the WORLD PRODIGY first learned that the pilot's working frequency was VHF-FM channel 10 after the master established radio contact (using VHF-FM channel 16) with the pilot boat (about 1500). The pilot and operator both stated that the remaining VHF-FM transmissions were conducted using VHF-FM channel 10. The Safety Board believes that the lack of information in the *U.S. Coast Pilot* about communication procedures increases the risk of a breakdown in communication between inbound vessels and State pilots. The Safety Board also believes that the existence of incorrect or otherwise outdated pilotage information contained in the *U.S. Coast Pilot* could create an unsafe situation and that the Rhode Island State Pilotage Commission should take immediate action to ensure that all pilotage information and procedures in future editions of the *U.S. Coast Pilot (Volume 2)* are updated as needed.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Rhode Island State Pilotage Commission:

Take steps to ensure that Rhode Island State pilots board and disembark all foreign- and U.S.-flag vessels (under register) south of Brenton Reef Light. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-91-1)

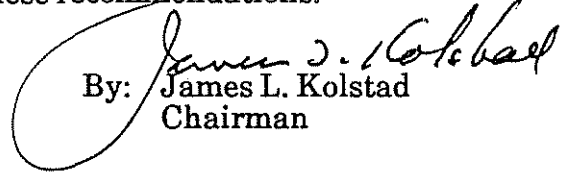
Require that State pilots advise in a timely manner all inbound vessels seeking a State pilot of the location of the pilot boarding area. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-91-2)

Provide the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration with information to update the *U.S. Coast Pilot (Volume 2)* concerning the location of the pilot boarding area and radiotelephone frequencies to be used by vessels to communicate with Rhode Island State pilots. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-91-3)

Also, as a result of its investigation, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations M-91-4 and -5 to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and M-91-6 and -7 to the U.S. Coast Guard.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations M-91-1 through -3 in your reply

KOLSTAD, Chairman, COUGHLIN, Vice Chairman, and BURNETT, LAUBER, and HART, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: James L. Kolstad
Chairman