



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

**REPORT OF THE INVESTIGATION
INTO THE
COMMERCIAL GOLD DREDGE VESSEL
CHARLOTTE (AK 5879C), CAPSIZING
AND CREWMEMBER LOSS OF LIFE
2NM SOUTHWEST OF CAPE NOME
NEAR NOME, AK ON OCTOBER 15,
2020**



U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. SE
Stop 7501
Washington, DC 20593-7501
Staff Symbol: CG-INV
Phone: (202) 372-1032
E-mail: CG-INV1@uscg.mil

16732/IIA # 7114883
12 August 2025

**CAPSIZING OF THE GOLD DREDGING VESSEL CHARLOTTE (AK5879C) AND
SUBSEQUENT LOSS OF TWO LIVES IN THE BERING SEA, 2 NAUTICAL MILES
SOUTHWEST OF CAPE NOME, ALASKA ON OCTOBER 15, 2020**

ACTION BY THE COMMANDANT

The record and the report of the investigation completed for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, and conclusions are approved. The two safety recommendations issued by the Coast Guard Arctic District (formerly District 17) in their endorsement to the report of investigation are approved subject to the following comments. This marine casualty investigation is closed.

ACTION ON SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

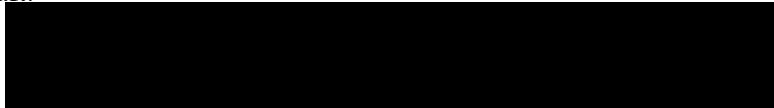
Recommendation 1: Recommend that new categories in the Marine Information for Safety and Law Enforcement (MISLE) database be created for "Dredge" and "Dredge Tender," as this marine casualty was categorized as a "Fish Vessel" casualty. Creating these new categories will allow the Coast Guard to identify and track issues relating to dredges in the future.

Action: I concur with the intent of this recommendation. Appropriate action has been taken to address this issue. Specifically, the vessel type, "Cutter/Dredger," with multiple subcategories under the "Miscellaneous Vessel" classification, exists in MISLE.

Recommendation 2: Subchapter C vessels should be required to have a survival craft with capacity for 100% of all persons on board the vessel when operating in cold, coastal waters.

Cold water means the cognizant Officer in Charge, Marine Inspections has determined that monthly mean low temperature of the water is <15°C (59°F).

Action: I do not concur with this recommendation. The primary issue identified in the investigation was a lack of crew familiarity, not inadequate survival craft capacity. Improved training likely would have increased crew survivability and the probability that all persons onboard would have successfully donned their immersion suits and embarked the available survival craft.



R. C. COMPHER
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Director of Inspections & Compliance (CG-5PC)

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commander
United States Coast Guard
Seventeenth District

709 W. 9th Street
Juneau, AK 99801
Staff Symbol: (dp)
Phone: (907) 463-2803

16732 /IA 7114883

AUG 23 2024

**COMMERCIAL GOLD DREDGE VESSEL CHARLOTTE (AK 5879C), CAPSIZING
AND CREWMEMBER LOSS OF LIFE 2NM SOUTHWEST OF CAPE NOME NEAR
NOME, AK ON OCTOBER 15, 2020**

ENDORSEMENT BY THE DISTRICT COMMANDER

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved subject to the following comments. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

COMMENTS ON THE REPORT

The *Charlotte* was an uninspected commercial vessel with limited regulatory oversight and safety equipment above the minimum requirements. Despite these additional safety items, two persons lost their lives and the vessel was a total loss. Concur with investigation conclusions that human factors and the harsh environment remain the most significant causal factors of the Charlotte capsizing and follow on loss of life.

ENDORSEMENT/ACTION ON RECOMMENDATIONS (if required)

Safety Recommendation. – Safety Recommendation: There were no proposed actions to add new or amend existing U.S. law or regulations, international requirements, industry standards, or U.S. Coast Guard policies and procedures as part of this investigation.

Endorsement: Do Not Concur.

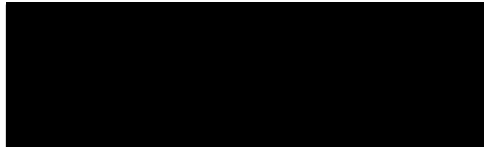
D17 recommends the following:

1. New categories in MISLE be created for "Dredge" and "Dredge Tender," as this marine casualty was categorized as a "Fish Vessel" casualty. Creating these new categories will allow the Coast Guard to identify and track issues relating to dredges in the future.

2. Subchapter C vessels be required to have a survival craft with capacity for 100% of all persons onboard the vessel when operating in cold¹ coastal² waters.

Administrative Recommendation. – Recommend this investigation be closed.

Endorsement: Concur.



M. M. Dean
RADM, U.S. Coast Guard
Seventeenth District Commander

Enclosures: (1) Executive Summary
(2) Investigating Officer's Report
(3) Endorsement by the Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection

¹ Cold water means the cognizant OCMI has determined the monthly mean low temperature of the water is $\leq 15^{\circ}\text{C}$ (59°F).

² As defined under 33 CFR 175.105.



16732
12 June 2024

**COMMERCIAL GOLD DREDGE VESSEL CHARLOTTE (AK 5879C), CAPSIZING
AND CREWMEMBER LOSS OF LIFE 2NM SOUTHWEST OF CAPE NOME NEAR
NOME, AK ON OCTOBER 15, 2020**

ENDORSEMENT BY THE OFFICER IN CHARGE, MARINE INSPECTION

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved subject to the following comments. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

ENDORSEMENT/ACTION ON RECOMMENDATIONS (if required)

Endorsement: Concur.



CHRISTOPHER A. CULPEPPER
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection

Enclosures: (1) Executive Summary
(2) Investigating Officer's Report



16732
June 12, 2024

**COMMERCIAL GOLD DREDGE VESSEL CHARLOTTE (AK 5879C), CAPSIZING
AND CREWMEMBER LOSS OF LIFE 2NM SOUTHWEST OF CAPE NOME NEAR
NOME, AK ON OCTOBER 15, 2020**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On October 10, 2020, at approximately 2100 hours, the gold dredge vessel CHARLOTTE got underway from the Port of Nome enroute to the Bluffs to conduct gold dredging operations. The crew on board the vessel was the captain and two deckhands. The crew dredged along the route and arrived at the Bluffs at approximately 2345 hours on October 14, 2020. The deckhands insisted they leave that evening due to the impending foul weather, but the captain argued and ultimately decided to return to the Port of Nome the following morning.

On October 15, 2020, at approximately 0915 hours, the captain got the vessel underway to return to the Port of Nome. There was limited visibility, and the sea state was approximately three to five feet. The National Weather Service had issued a Small Craft Advisory that morning with predictions of 30 knot winds and seven-foot seas. At approximately 1715 hours, the vessel was approximately two nautical miles southwest of Cape Nome, AK. The sea state had grown to approximately five to six feet with ten-foot swells.

The captain ordered the deckhands to secure the equipment on deck. The two deckhands began securing the deck equipment when Deckhand 1 observed the vessel to be beam-to in the waves. Suddenly, a large wave struck the vessel on the port side and the vessel immediately capsized, submerging all three crewmembers. The crewmembers surfaced shortly after the vessel overturned and climbed onto the overturned vessel by using the ribbing of the vessel as handholds. The captain was able to retrieve an immersion suit still in the stowage bag from the water. He gave it to Deckhand 2 and instructed him to don the suit. Deckhand 2 was unable to successfully don the suit. A second immersion suit was retrieved, and Deckhand 1 was able to successfully don the suit. A third immersion suit was found further in the water, and the captain instructed Deckhand 1 to retrieve it. Deckhand 1 reluctantly entered the water to retrieve the immersion suit. He was successfully able to retrieve the immersion suit and toss it to the captain. However, Deckhand 1 was not able to climb back onto the overturned vessel. Deckhand 1 decided to begin swimming to shore and swam into an inflatable life raft container. Though he had never deployed an inflatable life raft before, he observed the diagram and braced both feet against the container to pull the painter line. He was able to successfully inflate the life raft and climbed in. Deckhand 1 called to the captain and Deckhand 2, but they remained on the overturned vessel. Deckhand 1 fell asleep in the raft from being so exhausted. He woke up when

the raft washed onto shore. Deckhand 1 was able to walk to the road where he flagged down a passing vehicle and was able to contact the Alaska State Troopers. Search and rescue efforts were conducted by the Alaska State Troopers and the Coast Guard. On October 18, at approximately 1245 hours, the body of Deckhand 2 was found seven miles east of Nome. The body of the captain was never recovered.

Through its investigation, the Coast Guard determined the initiating event to be the wave striking the vessel. With no other means to prevent the vessel from capsizing, all crewmembers entered the water which ultimately led to the death of the captain and Deckhand 2. The causal factors contributing to this casualty were: 1) outside typical season to conduct gold dredge operations, 2) poor weather conditions, 3) lack of maintenance and up keep of the vessel, 4) the captain's disregard for crewmember concerns and weather conditions, 5) inept vessel maneuvering during poor weather and sea conditions, 6) lack of stability and freeboard, 7) insufficient lifesaving equipment knowledge, and 8) the failure to communicate location and nature of distress.



16732
June 12, 2024

**COMMERCIAL GOLD DREDGE VESSEL CHARLOTTE (AK 5879C), CAPSIZING
AND CREWMEMBER LOSS OF LIFE 2NM SOUTHWEST OF CAPE NOME NEAR
NOME, AK ON OCTOBER 15, 2020**

INVESTIGATING OFFICER'S REPORT

1. Preliminary Statement

a. This marine casualty investigation was conducted, and this report was submitted in accordance with Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Subpart 4.07, and under the authority of Title 46, United States Code (USC) Chapter 63.

1.2. The Investigating Office designated the Captain, and deckhands of the CHARLOTTE as a party-in-interest in this investigation. No other individuals, organizations, or parties were designated a party-in-interest in accordance with 46 CFR Subsection 4.03-10.

1.3. The Coast Guard was the lead agency for all evidence collection activities involving this investigation. The Alaska State Troopers assisted in this investigation.

1.4. All times listed in this report are in Alaska Standard Time using a 24-hour format and are approximate.

2. Vessel Involved in the Incident



Figure 1. Photo of the CHARLOTTE Bow Aspect taken in 2018.

Official Name:	CHARLOTTE
Identification Number:	5879C – Alaska State Number
Flag:	United States
Vessel Class/Type/Sub-Type:	Fishing Vessel/ Fish Catching Vessel / General
Build Year:	1971
Gross Tonnage:	11 GRT
Length:	32 feet
Main/Primary Propulsion:	Gasoline Outboard
Owner:	Alexie Klutchnikov, Nome, AK
Operator:	Alexie Klutchnikov, Nome, AK

3. Deceased, Missing, and/or Injured Persons

Relationship to Vessel	Sex	Age	Status
Deckhand 2	Male	56	Deceased
Captain	Male	52	Presumed Deceased

4. Findings of Fact

4.1 The Incident:

- 4.1.1. On October 10, 2020, at approximately 2100 hours, the gold dredge vessel CHARLOTTE got underway from the Port of Nome enroute to the Bluffs to conduct gold dredging operations. The crew on board the vessel was the Captain and two deckhands. The crew conducted dredging operations along their route to the Bluffs.
- 4.1.2. On October 14, 2020, at approximately 2345 hours, the CHARLOTTE arrived at its location at the Bluffs to conduct gold dredging operations. The deckhands were aware of the impending foul weather and argued with the Captain to return to port that evening. However, the Captain insisted on remaining overnight and returning the following morning.
- 4.1.3. On October 15, 2020, at approximately 0915 hours, the CHARLOTTE got underway from the Bluffs to return to the Port of Nome. There was limited visibility with seas approximately 3 to 5 feet.
- 4.1.4. At approximately 1700 hours, the CHARLOTTE was approximately 2 nautical miles southwest of Cape Nome. The sea state had grown to approximately 5 to 6 feet with 10-foot swells. Deckhand 1 noted that the CHARLOTTE was positioned beam-to the swells.

- 4.1.5. The Captain ordered the deckhands to secure the equipment on deck. Both deckhands began securing the miscellaneous equipment on the deck.
- 4.1.6. Suddenly, the CHARLOTTE was struck by a wave approximately 10 to 12 feet on the port side. The vessel overturned, submerging all crewmembers.
- 4.1.7. The two deckhands surfaced shortly after the vessel overturned and the Captain surfaced approximately 30 to 40 seconds later. All three crewmembers were able to climb onto the overturned vessel by utilizing the ribbing as handholds.
- 4.1.8. The crewmembers huddled together to conserve heat when the Captain saw an immersion suit still in the stowage bag floating. He was able to retrieve it and instructed Deckhand 2 to don the immersion suit. Deckhand 2 was not successful at donning the immersion suit and was only able to get it on about halfway.
- 4.1.9. A second immersion suit was retrieved from the water and Deckhand 1 was able to successfully don it.
- 4.1.10. The Captain saw a third immersion suit floating further away from the overturned vessel and instructed Deckhand 1 to retrieve it for him. Deckhand 1 reluctantly entered the water and was able to retrieve the immersion suit and toss it to the Captain. However, Deckhand 1 was not able to climb back onto the overturned vessel. He communicated with the Captain that he was going to swim to shore. The Captain argued, telling Deckhand 1 to stay because the Coast Guard would come rescue them. Deckhand 1 replied that no one was coming for them because they did not make any distress calls or grab the EPIRB prior to capsizing.
- 4.1.11. Deckhand 1 began swimming to shore when his head struck a heavy object. He turned around to discover that it was an inflatable life raft container. Deckhand 1 had never deployed an inflatable life raft before but utilized the diagram. After bracing both feet against the life raft container and pulled the painter line, he was successfully able to deploy the life raft and climbed in.
- 4.1.12. Deckhand 1 attempted to communicate with the other crewmembers by yelling for them to swim to the life raft, but the Captain and Deckhand 2 remained on the overturned vessel.
- 4.1.13. After successfully putting together the life raft's oar, Deckhand 1 fell asleep from exhaustion. He was awoken when the life raft beached onto the shore. Despite suffering from the cold and exhaustion, Deckhand 1 managed to climb out of the life raft and walk to the road to flag down a passing vehicle and contact the Alaska State Trooper.
- 4.1.14. At approximately 2053 hours, the Alaska State Troopers contacted the Coast Guard District 17 Command Center to request assistance to search for the Captain and Deckhand 2.
- 4.1.15. On October 18, 2020, at approximately 1242 hours, the body of Deckhand 2 was located on the beach, approximately seven miles east of Point Nome.

4.1.16. The body of the Captain was never recovered.

4.1.17. On October 21, 2020, Deckhand 1 submitted a CG-2692.

4.2 Additional/Supporting Information:

4.2.1. The CHARLOTTE was an aluminum vessel with two outboard gas engines outfitted to be a gold dredging vessel. Alterations were made to the vessel for gold dredging operations to include holes in both sides of the vessel to install a sluice box for gold dredging operations. The sluice box was never screwed in or secured directly to the vessel. Holes were cut out at the stern of the vessel for the two outboard engines. The vessel was frequently overloaded with equipment.

4.2.2. The Captain was the owner and operator of the vessel CHARLOTTE with one vessel in his fleet. Records indicate that the vessel was properly registered as a fishing vessel between the years of 2014 through 2016. In 2018, a letter was issued to the vessel by Coast Guard Sector Anchorage ordering to complete a dockside safety exam. The vessel received a safety examination for gold dredging operations in 2018 and 2019 but did not pass either examination.

4.2.3. The deckhand stated that the Captain had been operating the CHARLOTTE from 2012 when he began as a solo operator. The Captain did not hold a merchant mariner credential, which was not required for his position.

4.2.4. Deckhand 1 had been on board the CHARLOTTE and working with the Captain for approximately 7 years. The deckhand did not hold a merchant mariner credential, which was not required for his position. He had a background in engineering and assisted the Captain with machinery and ensuring the boat was operational.

4.2.5. Deckhand 2 had been on board the CHARLOTTE and working with the Captain for approximately three months. He did not hold a merchant mariner credential, which was not required for his position. He had no other experience working on vessels before his time on the CHARLOTTE.

4.2.6. The typical season for gold dredging operations is from approximately June 15 to the end of September. There is no set start and end date for the season, however, this is the industry norm.

4.2.7. The crew of the CHARLOTTE had never been trained or familiarized with any of the lifesaving equipment on board and had never conducted drills.

4.2.8. On October 15, 2020, at 1421 hours, the National Weather Service in Fairbanks, AK released a weather report that noted a small craft advisory for the Norton Sound area. The predicted weather was south winds 30kts with seas of 7 feet.

5. Analysis

5.1 An irregular time to conduct gold dredge operations due to uncertain and unsafe weather conditions. The surviving crewmember and harbor Captain stated that the vessel

frequently operated past the typical gold dredging season. Though there is no set start and end date for these operations, most gold dredging mariners do not operate past late September due to the frequent foul weather and uncertainty. The industry norm is to start around the middle of June and end around the end of September. It is unknown whether the Captain was aware of this industry norm for gold dredging season. Had the Captain not been operating during an irregular time to conduct gold dredging operations, it is possible that the vessel would not have encountered such uncertain and severe weather and sea conditions, which ultimately led the vessel capsizing and the death of two crewmembers.

5.2 Poor weather conditions while the vessel was transiting. The National Weather Service had issued a small craft advisory for the Norton Sound area at 0453 hours on October 15, 2020, before the vessel got underway to return to the Port of Nome from the Bluffs. The weather was forecasted to be south winds at 30 kts with seas at 7 feet. A small craft advisory is issued when winds have reached dangerous speeds and is a warning for all boaters to take appropriate precautions. Most gold dredging vessels ended operations for the season due to the uncertainty of weather in the later season, typically ending operations in late September, though there is no set start and end date for the season. Whether the Captain was aware of the Small Craft Advisory and incoming foul weather is unknown. Had the weather not been as severe, it is believed that the vessel may have not been struck with a large wave, causing the vessel to capsize which ultimately led to the death of two crewmembers.

5.3 Overall lack of maintenance and up keeping of vessel by the owner, operator, and crewmembers. During a witness interview with the surviving crewmember and a previous crewmember on board the vessel, it was identified that the vessel was grossly under-maintained and overloaded. Both stated that the holds were typically full of water, safety equipment were expired, and had numerous safety issues throughout the vessel. The inboard engine was replaced with two large gasoline outboard engines that required the stern of the vessel to be partially cut out. In order to install the dredging equipment, holes were cut out on the sides of the vessel for sluice boxes but was never secured permanently. Additionally, the vessel had failed two of its last safety exams due to these issues. The vessel had an overall lack of maintenance and safety standards. Had the vessel and its safety equipment been better maintained, the vessel may have not capsized after the wave struck the vessel.

5.4 The Captain's disregard for crewmembers concerns about impending foul weather and small craft advisory. While interviewing the surviving crewmember and a previous deckhand, it was stated that the Captain frequently argued and disregarded the crewmember's input. The surviving crewmember stated that he and the deceased deckhand had argued with the Captain about returning to port due to the incoming foul weather. He stated that the Captain disregarded their request and stated they would be returning to port the following morning. The Captain was known to frequently operate during foul weather and at night. Despite the input from the deckhands, the Captain made the ultimate decision to get underway while there was Small Craft Advisory in place. If the Captain did not make the decision to stay out longer than the deckhands had insisted, the vessel may have not encountered such severe weather and sea conditions and would have avoided the wave striking the vessel which ultimately led the vessel to capsize.

5.5 Inept vessel maneuvering by the Captain during poor weather and sea conditions. Many smaller gold dredging vessels operate relatively close to shore while transiting and conducting gold dredging operations. The vessel's location at the time of the incident was approximately 2nm from shore. Additionally, the surviving deckhand stated that he observed the vessel to be beam-to the wave's moments before the incident. He attempted to inform the Captain to maneuver the vessel in such manner that the waves were not directly striking the vessel but was struck by the wave before he could communicate with the Captain. The Captain is not a credentialed mariner, nor is it required for his position. However, had the Captain been more knowledgeable and skilled at operating small vessels in heavy sea conditions and foul weather, it is possible that he could have avoided the wave from striking the vessel and ultimately causing the vessel to capsize and lead to the death of himself and a deckhand.

5.6 Vessel's overall lack of stability and freeboard. The surviving deckhand a previous deckhand on board the vessel stated that the vessel frequently overloaded and had excess equipment on board. Additionally, the vessel had water ingress from the stern cut out and sluice box cut outs. The holds were routinely filled with water and the crewmembers had to bail out the water. The previous deckhand noted that the vessel was often listed over. Due to these issues, the vessel had an overall lack of stability and freeboard. Had the vessel had better stability and greater freeboard, the vessel may have not capsized when the wave struck the side.

5.7 Insufficient knowledge of lifesaving equipment by the crewmembers. The deceased deckhand had very little experience being on vessels, he had been on the vessel for the previous three months which was the extent of his experience. The crew had not conducted any lifesaving drills nor had the deckhand ever donned an immersion suit. When the crew all fell into the water, they were able to retrieve immersion suits from the water. However, the deckhand was not able to don the immersion suit. It is unknown if the size of the immersion suit was appropriate for the deckhand. Had the immersion suit been an appropriate size and the deckhand had experience donning immersion suits, it is possible his death could have been prevented.

5.8 The failure to communicate location and nature of distress prior to capsizing. While the vessel was returning to the Port of Nome, the Captain had not been in communication with anyone. Prior to the vessel capsizing, there were no mayday calls made. Additionally, no one grabbed the EPIRB. Had the Captain communicated with anyone prior to capsizing, it is possible that search and rescue could have been launched sooner and the deckhand and Captain could have been rescued.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Determination of Cause:

6.1.1. The initiating event for this casualty occurred when the wave struck the vessel.
Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.1.1. The irregular timing of the Captain to conduct gold dredge operations.

6.1.1.2. The poor weather conditions and small craft advisory.

6.1.1.3. An overall lack of maintenance and up-keeping of the vessel.

6.1.1.4. The captain's disregard for the crewmembers concerns of the incoming foul weather.

6.1.1.5. The inept vessel maneuvering by the captain during poor weather and sea conditions.

6.1.2. The capsizing of the vessel. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.2.1. Lack of stability and freeboard of the vessel due to modifications and overloading.

6.1.3. The death of deckhand 2. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.3.1. The insufficient knowledge of lifesaving equipment by Deckhand 2.

6.1.5. The presumed death of the captain. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.5.1. Failure to communicate location and nature of distress prior to capsizing the vessel.

6.2. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by Any Coast Guard Credentialed Mariner Subject to Action Under 46 USC Chapter 77: There were no acts of misconduct, incompetence, negligence, unskillfulness, or violations of law by a credentialed mariner identified as part of this investigation.

6.3. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other personal: There were no acts of misconduct, incompetence, negligence, unskillfulness, or willful violations by a Coast Guard or other Federal Agency member identified as part of this investigation.

6.4. Evidence of Act(s) Subject to Civil Penalty: There were no evidence of acts identified in this investigation that would subject a person to Civil Penalty.

6.5. Evidence of Criminal Act(s): This investigation did not identify violations of criminal law.

6.6. Need for New or Amended U.S. Law or Regulation: This investigation identified no matters needing new or amended U.S. law or regulation.

7. Actions Taken Since the Incident

7.1 Sector Anchorage produced a Gold Dredge Safety Handout 2023. This document explains Sector Anchorage's oversight of the gold dredge program in Western Alaska. The handout includes information for gold dredge vessels requiring a Certificate of Inspection (COI) and other documentation requirements, voluntary dockside examinations, an applicability job aid, the gold dredge safety examination checklist, marine casualty reporting requirements, and Navigation Rule 27, lights and flag for vessel engaged in dredge diving operations.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Safety Recommendation: There were no proposed actions to add new or amend existing U.S. law or regulations, international requirements, industry standards, or U.S. Coast Guard policies and procedures as part of this investigation.

8.2 Administrative Recommendations:

8.2.1 Recommend this investigation be closed.



Lieutenant
U.S. Coast Guard
Investigating Officer