



# UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

**REPORT OF THE INVESTIGATION  
INTO THE  
SINKING AND LOSS OF LIFE ON THE RECREATIONAL  
VESSEL (LA-8245-FZ) IN THE GULF OF MEXICO ON  
AUGUST 23, 2024**



U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security

United States  
Coast Guard



Commandant  
United States Coast Guard

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16732/IIA #7991520  
07 April 2025

**SINKING OF THE RECREATIONAL VESSEL LA8245FZ AND SUBSEQUENT LOSS  
OF ONE LIFE IN THE GULF OF AMERICA, APPROXIMATELY 7.5 NAUTICAL  
MILES SOUTH OF VERMILION BAY, LOUISIANA ON AUGUST 23, 2024**

**ACTION BY THE COMMANDANT**

The record and the report of investigation completed for this marine casualty have been reviewed by the Office of Investigations & Casualty Analysis. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analyses, and conclusions are approved. This marine casualty investigation is closed.



E. B. SAMMS  
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard  
Chief, Office of Investigations & Casualty Analysis (CG-INV)



16732  
MAR 5 2025

**SINKING AND LOSS OF LIFE ON THE RECREATIONAL  
VESSEL (LA-8245-FZ) IN THE GULF OF MEXICO ON  
AUGUST 23, 2024**

**ENDORSEMENT BY THE COMMANDER,  
EIGHTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT**

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. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

**COMMENTS ON THE REPORT**

1. The loss of the passenger was a tragic and preventable accident. I offer my sincere condolences to the friends and family of the passenger who lost their life.
2. The investigation and report contain valuable information which can be used to address the factors that contributed to this marine casualty and prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.



J. E. FOTHERGILL  
Commander, U.S. Coast Guard  
Chief of Prevention, Acting  
Eighth Coast Guard District  
By Direction



16732  
February 25, 2025

**SINKING AND LOSS OF LIFE ON THE RECREATIONAL VESSEL (LA-8245-FZ) IN  
THE GULF OF MEXICO ON AUGUST 23, 2024**

**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.

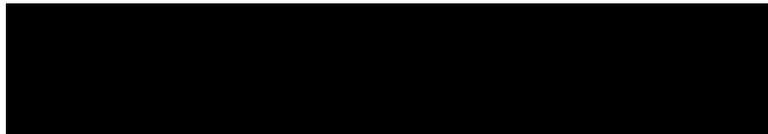
**COMMENTS ON THE REPORT**

The loss of life in this marine casualty was a tragic yet preventable accident. I offer my sincerest condolences to the family and friends of the passenger who lost his life because of this incident.

**ENDORSEMENT ON RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Administrative Recommendation 1.** Recommend this investigation be closed.

**Endorsement:** Concur – recommend this investigation be closed.



B. D. WELLS  
Commander, U.S. Coast Guard  
Acting Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection  
Houma, Louisiana



16732  
February 14, 2025

## **SINKING AND LOSS OF LIFE ON THE RECREATIONAL VESSEL (LA-8245-FZ) IN THE GULF OF MEXICO ON AUGUST 23, 2024**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On August 23, 2024, two persons, the Owner and Passenger 1, departed from Vermillion Bay, LA offshore towards Vermillion (VR) Block 31 to fish recreationally from the Owner's 17-foot aluminum center console open boat. The two fished near the platform until around 1200 when they pulled up their lines and got underway to head back to shore. As Passenger 1, who was operating the vessel at this time, attempted to increase the vessel's speed, the engine did not respond to the throttle's input and then the outboard engine unexpectedly cut out. The vessel abruptly slowed down and the following wake came over the transom of the vessel, filling the open boat with water and subsequently causing it to sink from beneath the two occupants. Both occupants, not wearing any personal flotation devices, attempted to swim towards a nearby platform. The Owner was able to make it to the nearby platform but could no longer see or hear the Passenger 1 in the water. The Owner utilized his cell phone to call ashore for emergency assistance. The Coast Guard and partner agencies commenced a search for Passenger 1 over the course of the next three days. The Owner was taken ashore by first responders and sustained no known injuries. On the evening of August 25, 2024, the Coast Guard suspended its search efforts for Passenger 1. Passenger 1 is missing and presumed dead. The 17-foot vessel sank and was never recovered.

While an initial telephonic interview of the Owner was able to be conducted following the incident, the Owner did not return any further requests for information about the incident or the vessel. Marine Safety Unit Houma Investigators made multiple telephonic and email attempts to contact the Owner over the two months following the incident. The information found in this marine casualty investigation is based solely off the brief initial interview the Coast Guard was able to conduct with the Owner and could not be corroborated by additional interviews or physical evidence.

As a result of its investigation, the U.S. Coast Guard found the initiating event to be the failure of the outboard engine. Subsequent events included the sinking of the vessel, both occupants entering the water, and the presumed death of Passenger 1. The causal factors identified that contributed to these events were: 1) Failure to have secondary means of propulsion, 2) Failure to follow vessel's approved operating conditions, 3) Lack of survival craft or secondary means to stay afloat, and 4) Failure to wear personal flotation devices (PFDs).



16732  
February 14, 2025

## SINKING AND LOSS OF LIFE ON THE RECREATIONAL VESSEL (LA-8245-FZ) IN THE GULF OF MEXICO ON AUGUST 23, 2024

### INVESTIGATING OFFICER'S REPORT

#### 1. Preliminary Statement

1.1. 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. No organizations or individuals were designated a party-in-interest in accordance with 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subsection 4.03-10.

1.3. The Coast Guard was the lead agency for all evidence collection activities involving this investigation. No other persons or organizations assisted in this investigation.

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

1.5. All witnesses, survivors, and the deceased's next of kin connected to this incident declined to participate in this investigation. Multiple unsuccessful attempts were made by the U.S. Coast Guard to collect further statements and information from those parties. While an initial interview was conducted with the one survivor following the incident, critical information surrounding this investigation could not be further corroborated in the ensuing investigation due to the lack of participation from those involved parties; the information obtained in this report is based solely off the initial information the Investigating Officer was able to obtain from the one survivor's initial interview.

#### 2. Vessel Involved in the Incident



Figure 1. Picture of similar vessel to the one involved in incident. Obtained on 1/3/2025 from manufacture's website.

Official Name:	N/A
Identification Number:	State Number: LA-8245-FZ HIN: UFQ02229H212
Flag:	United States
Vessel Class/Type/Sub-Type	Recreational Vessel (Gator Tail)
Build Year:	2012
Gross Tonnage:	N/A, estimated weight <1000 pounds
Length:	17' 0"
Beam/Width:	48" (estimated)
Transom:	21" (estimated)
Main/Primary Propulsion:	Gasoline Outboard (35 HP)
Owner:	[REDACTED]
Operator:	[REDACTED]

**3. Deceased, Missing, and/or Injured Persons**

Relationship to Vessel	Sex	Age	Status
Passenger 1	Male	49	Missing

**4. Findings of Fact**

4.1. The Incident:

4.1.1. On the morning of August 23, 2024, two friends, Owner & Passenger 1, departed from Vermillion Bay, LA in their 17' aluminum vessel and headed approximately 7.5 miles offshore into the Gulf of Mexico to fish in Vermillion Block 31 (VR31).

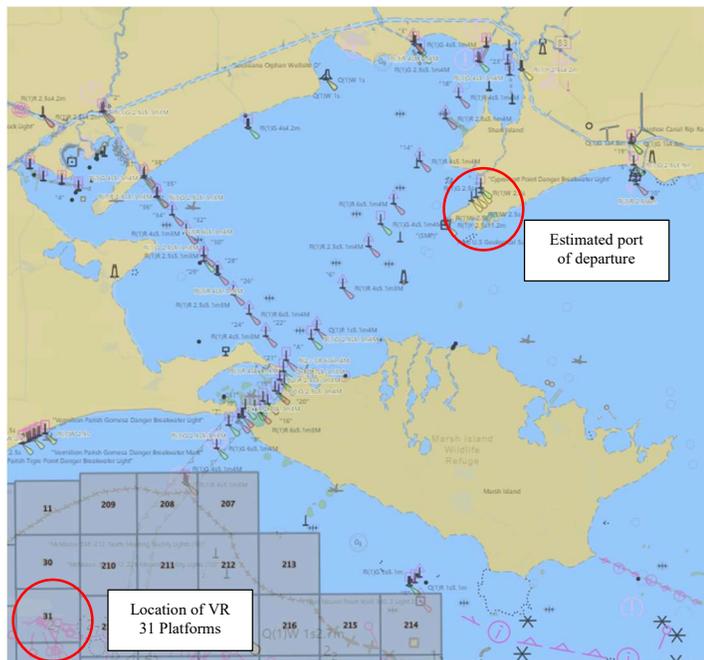


Figure 2. Approximate location of point of departure and VR31 platforms. Image taken from NOAA ECN viewer.

- 4.1.2. The Owner and Passenger 1 fished near the VR31 platform until approximately 1200 when they decided it was time to return to port.
- 4.1.3. Passenger 1 took control of the throttle and attempted to speed the vessel up. The vessel's engine did not respond to the increase in throttle being given by Passenger 1.
- 4.1.4. For reasons unknown, the vessel's outboard engine cut out and stopped provided propulsion to the vessel.
- 4.1.5. As the vessel abruptly slowed down, the following wake flooded over the vessel's transom and swamped the vessel out.
- 4.1.6. The vessel quickly sank from beneath Passenger 1 and the Owner, forcing them both into the water.
- 4.1.7. The Owner was able to swim to the nearby VR31 platform but quickly lost sight of Passenger 1 in the water.
- 4.1.8. The Owner climbed the platform and used his cellphone to call emergency services for assistance.
- 4.1.9. The Owner was safely rescued by emergency responders, suffering no injuries.
- 4.1.10. Search and Rescue efforts were conducted over the next three days for Passenger 1.
- 4.1.11. On the evening of August 25, 2024, the search for Passenger 1 was suspended and Passenger 1 was presumed deceased.
- 4.1.12. The vessel was never recovered after sinking and was deemed a total loss.

#### 4.2. Additional/Supporting Information:

- 4.2.1. Neither Passenger 1 nor the Owner had personal floatation devices (PFDs) donned prior to the incident. It is unclear if life preservers were available onboard the vessel prior at the time of the incident.
- 4.2.2. The Owner did not state that any survival craft or other lifesaving equipment was available onboard the vessel.
- 4.2.3. The 17' vessel, manufactured by Gator Tail LLC, was designed for shallow water use only and was not approved for use offshore.
- 4.2.4. No Recreational Boating Accident Report, form CG-3865, was submitted for this incident as the Owner did not respond to multiple attempts to obtain the report by USCG Investigating Officers.

## 5. Analysis

- 5.1. **Failure to have secondary means of propulsion.** It is not clear what caused the outboard engine to stop working at the time of the incident. No additional information on the

engine's previous maintenance or known issues could be obtained by the Owner. The vessel did not have a secondary means of propulsion that could have been utilized when the first one failed. Had the engine not failed in this incident or a secondary means of propulsion been available, the vessel could have maintained its forward movement and not have been flooded out by the following wake when the outboard engine failed.

**5.2. Failure to follow vessel's approved operating conditions.** The 17' recreational vessel was only approved for shallow water use, not for use in offshore environments. The Operator and Passenger 1 took their vessel approximately 7.5 miles offshore, well beyond the area the vessel was approved to operate in. Had the Operator and Passenger 1 stayed in shallow waters, the vessel likely would not have been swamped out, sank, or caused them both to have to enter the water. Alternatively, the Owner and Passenger 1 could have chosen to utilize another vessel more appropriate to operate offshore.

**5.3. Lack of survival craft or secondary means to stay afloat.** While not required by law or regulation, the vessel was not equipped with any version of a survival craft or other secondary means of keeping its occupants afloat if the vessel were to sink. Had this vessel been equipped with some form of survival craft, it is likely that the two occupants would have been able to enter or otherwise hold onto the craft, keeping them afloat or even out of the water long enough for emergency responders to save both of their lives.

**5.4. Failure to wear personal flotation devices (PFDs).** While not required by law or regulation, neither Passenger 1 or the Owner had a personal flotation device donned prior to or during the incident. Had both persons been wearing an appropriate PFD, it is likely that Passenger 1 would have stayed afloat and prevented his likely drowning and subsequent death.

## **6. Conclusions**

6.1. Determination of Cause:

6.1.1. The initiating event for this casualty occurred when the outboard engine failed and the vessel lost propulsion. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.1.1. Failure to have secondary means of propulsion.

6.1.2. The outboard engine failing subsequently led to the vessel being waked out and sinking. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.2.1. Failure to follow vessel's approved operating conditions.

6.1.3. The vessel's sinking was subsequently followed by both vessel occupants entering the water. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.3.1. Lack of survival craft or secondary means to stay afloat.

6.1.4. The final event in this incident was the presumed drowning and loss of life of Passenger 1. Causal factors leading to this event were:

6.1.4.1. Failure to wear personal flotation devices (PFDs).

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: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts by any Coast Guard credentialed mariners subject to action under 46 USC Chapter 77.

6.3. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other person: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts or violations of law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other person.

6.4. Evidence of Act(s) Subject to Civil Penalty: This investigation did not identify any evidence of acts subject to civil penalty.

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

6.6. Need for New or Amended U.S. Law or Regulation: This investigation did not identify a need to require new or amend any current laws or regulations.

6.7. Unsafe Actions or Conditions that could not be deemed as causal factors:

6.7.1. The Owner stated Passenger 1 had previously suffered a heart attack in 2023 and had ongoing cardiac issues in 2024 leading up to this incident. These medical conditions could not be verified during this investigation but cannot be ruled out as potential causal factors in Passenger 1's presumed death.

**7. Actions Taken Since the Incident**

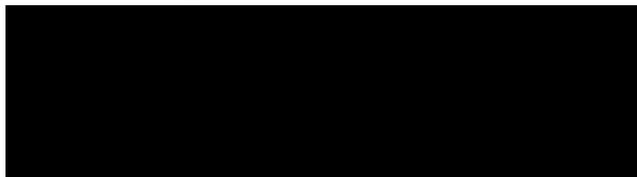
7.1. No actions have been taken since the incident occurred.

**8. Recommendations**

8.1. Safety Recommendation: None.

8.2. Administrative Recommendations:

8.2.1. Recommend this investigation be closed.



Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Coast Guard  
Investigating Officer