



FINDINGS OF CONCERN

Sector / Air Station Corpus Christi

August 9, 2022
Corpus Christi, Texas

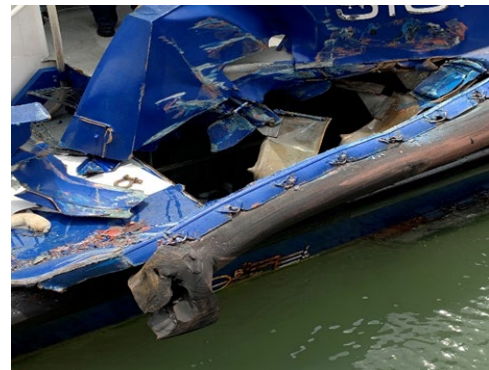
Findings of Concern 006-22

VOYAGE PLANNING FOR HARBOR ASSIST TOWING VESSELS

Purpose. The U.S. Coast Guard issues findings of concern to disseminate information related to unsafe conditions that were identified as causal factors in a casualty and could contribute to future incidents. Findings of concern are intended to educate the public, state, or local agencies about the conditions discovered so they may address the findings with an appropriate voluntary action or highlight existing applicable company policies or state/local regulations.

The Incident. A heavy-lift vessel was transiting inbound within a constrained channel. There were two pilots onboard, supported by three harbor assist tugs stationed on the port bow, the starboard bow, and the stern. As the vessel made a hard left turn toward the green side of the channel, the port-side assist tug was led aground, caught between the hull of the heavy-lift and the navigational channel limits. Unaware of the grounding, the heavy-lift vessel proceeded, raking the grounded assist tug down its port side until the tug became wedged under the heavy-lift's outrigger structure. Unable to free itself, the tug remained lodged under the heavy-lift until it could execute a salvage plan that took several days to accomplish.

Contributing Factors and Analysis. The investigation revealed several contributing factors, including a lack of voyage planning and human factors. However, the predominant causal factor in this accident was the lack of "bailout" procedures for assist tugs to cast off and leave a deep draft vessel during potentially dangerous situations. Because of their obligation to ensure the safety of the deep draft vessels, towing vessel captains may find it difficult to decide when they should abandon their positions and lay off the deep draft, especially when doing so could mean leaving the deep draft vessel in a potentially dangerous situation. Therefore, it may be important for towing companies to suggest parameters to assist captains in making "bail out" decisions to ensure the safety of their vessels and crew. Additionally, it is important that the Pilots are aware of and understand these parameters so they can best pre-plan and manage any emergent situations.



Findings of Concern. Coast Guard Investigators have identified the following measures to enhance the safe transit of deep draft vessels and harbor assist tugs:



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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- Each company operating harbor assist tugs should consider guidelines for “bailing out,” when the towing vessels’ captains should depart a deep draft vessel for the safety of their own vessel and crew.
- Each company operating harbor assist towing vessels should consider training with their captains and crew in scenarios when “bailing out” is prudent.

Closing. These findings of concern are provided for informational purpose only and do not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational, or material requirements. For any questions or comments please contact Sector / Air Station Corpus Christi Investigations Division by phone at (361) 939-5140 or by email at CorpusChristiIO@uscg.mil.