



# UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

## MARINE SAFETY ALERT

### Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Washington, DC

Safety Alert 9-15

### **ANYONE CAN STEER A BOAT**

*But your employees and customers deserve more!*

This Safety Alert serves as a reminder to owners and operators of pollution response vessels and other types of special purpose vessels of the need to employ knowledgeable operators with appropriate seamanship skills to navigate their vessels. It emphasizes the responsibilities of owners and operators to ensure a safe working environment for employees and passengers irrespective of the absence of applicable federal regulations regarding the need for vessel inspections or credentialed mariners.

Recently on the Lower Mississippi River two pollution response vessels collided while traveling in opposite directions at speeds of approximately 30 and 40 mph respectively. Onboard the northbound 30-foot vessel was an operator and 17 other persons from pollution response organizations. The operator was not a licensed mariner and was not familiar with the Inland Rules of the Road. Onboard the southbound 36-foot vessel, were two persons, an operator possessing a license and another employee. Neither operator was using their radar equipment or posted a lookout during the evening transit. Witnesses reported that the southbound vessel did not have its bow lights illuminated and it was determined that the northbound operator had never taken a formal boating safety course.



As the vessels approached each other, the southbound vessel operator noticed the red bow light of an oncoming vessel and turned towards starboard in accordance with the Rules of the Road, while the northbound vessel saw just a black silhouette and turned towards port. A few moments later, the vessels collided as the northbound vessel's starboard bow corner struck the southbound vessel's square front bow.



As a result, both vessels sustained moderate damage and 15 people were hurt including multiple head, neck, and back injuries that required on-scene triage and emergency transport to local hospitals. The incident could have been much worse as accident investigators noted that there would likely have been numerous fatalities if the angle of impact been slightly different.

Both operators contributed to the collision by not understanding or adhering to the Inland Rules of the Road.

As a result of this casualty the Coast Guard **strongly recommends** that all pollution response companies and other industries that operate special purpose vessels without licensed or credential mariners do the following:

- Develop policies and hiring prerequisites that require all boat operators to attend a formal boating safety course which includes basic Inland Rules of the Road.
- Critically examine boat operations to determine if sufficient attention has been given to the safety of company employees and other personnel who are transported or work onboard their vessels.

This safety alert is provided for informational purposes only and does not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational or material requirement. Special thanks to the Investigations Office of Sector New Orleans and the Eighth Coast Guard District Inspections and Investigations Branch. Developed and distributed by the Office of Investigations and Casualty Analysis, Washington DC. Questions may be sent to [HQS-PF-flidr-CG-INV@uscg.mil](mailto:HQS-PF-flidr-CG-INV@uscg.mil).